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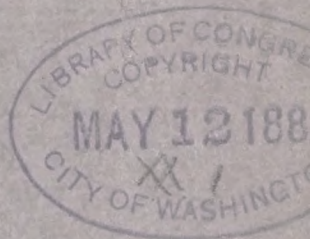
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# IF LOVE BE LOVE

A Forest Idyl

40  
BY D. CECIL GIBBS

"In Love—if Love be Love—if Love be ours,  
Faith and unfaith can ne'er be equal powers:  
Unfaith in aught is want of faith in all."



*Books you may hold readily in your hand are the most useful, after all*  
DR. JOHNSON

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W. J. H. July 18, 1906

# IF LOVE BE LOVE.

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## CHAPTER I.

“Discussing how their courtship grew,  
And talk of others that are wed,  
And how she look'd and what he said,  
And back we come at fall of dew.”—TENNYSON.

BOISY-LA-REINE! Have you ever heard of Boisy-la-Reine? Probably not, and equally probable is it that ninety-nine out of every hundred Frenchmen could tell you no more about it than that there is such a place in the *Département* of Seine-et-Marne, that they have seen the name in the *Indicateur* of the Chemin-de-fer de Lyon, and possibly may have remarked it on the façade, as journeying southward the so-called express train from Paris crawled past the diminutive *Gare*, which stands like an oasis of lath and plaster in the midst of a desert of forest.

And yet, insignificant as Boisy-la-Reine appears to the outside world, the little straggling township, with its suburbs of white stucco villas surmounted by peaked and gabled roofs of stained pine, its dusty poplar-lined roads converging towards the main street in which, a good mile from the railway, stand all the public buildings and nearly all the shops, is, in the eyes of its inhabitants, a place of supreme importance. Does it not contain its Mairie, garrisoned by at least three gendarmes? Can it not boast of its Market-place, its college, its Palais de Justice, and its ancient Church of St. Gudule? And then, if to these material advantages be added its situation on the banks of a river navigable for rafts and small craft, and its proximity to a noble forest, surely it must be allowed that Boisy-la-Reine has the right to consider itself one of the favored spots of *La belle France*, and by so much the more of the entire earth?

This pride of station is fostered and enhanced by the awe and admiration of the neighboring villages, by whom Boisy-la-Reine, owing to the remoteness of the *chef-lieu* of the *Département*, is always the town *par excellence*.

In one of the side streets, taking its departure from the Place St. Gudule, opposite the church, and winding along the wooded slopes



which border the river, stands a large conventual-looking building—or rather, collection of buildings—surrounded by a high wall of flints and mortar. Over the fancifully constructed iron grille depends a large black board, on which is written in massive gilt letters—*Pensionnat pour les Demoiselles*.

To-day the short gravel walk, hedged in on either side by a mass of densely grown shrubs, which leads from the roadway to the main entrance of the building, is strewn at intervals with flowers, rice, and a few odd satin slippers. Glimpses are to be caught through the open door of excited female forms clad in gala attire fluttering from room to room and about the passages. In a long, low, white-washed apartment at the end of the hall two lengthy deal tables, flanked by benches to match, still bear evidences of a lately completed meal, the festal character of which is demonstrated by a profusion of flowers and remnants of ornamental cakes and bonbons. Evidently some event has occurred to galvanize the inhabitants of this domicile of staid routine and prim decorum into a state of rejoicing and excitement.

The buzz of conversation, intermingled with peals of girlish laughter, issues from a room on the right, into which a trim maid-servant, bedecked with ribbons and favors, has just entered, bearing coffee for the assembled guests.

Let us follow her into this, the state salon of the principals of the establishment, and make ourselves acquainted with the cause of this unwonted festivity.

Near the door, busily engaged in conversation with M. le Curé, sits Mademoiselle Mathilde Delaforet, the eldest of the three maiden sisters by whom the school is conducted. This lady, clad in rich, yet sober-colored and somewhat old-fashioned silk, has silver-gray hair and piercing dark eyes. These, and a certain stateliness of carriage, give her the air of one used to command, tempered, however, by a cheerful and benevolent expression.

Dispersed about the room are a score of ladies and gentlemen, the former predominating as well in numbers as in conversational power, to judge from the constant rattle of their tongues.

Centre of a small group of the male sex, all attired in evening dress and white cravats, although it is yet early in the afternoon, stands Mademoiselle Clarisse, the youngest of the Demoiselles Delaforet. This young lady—for such we suppose we must describe her, as she thus considers herself—is not without pretensions to good looks. Her vivacious manners and ready laughter, added to a certain studied juvenility of attire, might lead a casual observer to place her on a much lower rung of the ladder of Time than she had actually attained. But the deception—if deception we must call it—is an innocent and easily pardonable one, since it leads her to cultivate graces and amiabilities which her sister Hortense, next on the rostrum, higher up, has seen fit to abandon as useless.

The second Mademoiselle Delaforet labors under a highly romantic and nervous disposition. Ever since the unfortunate termination of an early *affaire de cœur*—an episode which occurred in the far-off



times, when their parents were alive and the three sisters were not compelled to labor for daily bread—Hortense has posed as a *femme incomprise*. Why she, more than the others, should lay claim to especial sympathy and compassion, nobody knows. Nevertheless, her rights under this head are firmly established, and “poor Hortense,” the only sleeping partner in the concern, is never asked—nor has it ever entered her head—to volunteer any assistance in the active work in which her sisters are engaged. This, however, does not prevent her from absorbing the lion’s share of the earnings of the establishment, nor from appropriating the best room, the best morsels that come to table, and the most comfortable chair in their joint sitting-room, for her private delectation.

Like most people who suffer from their nerves, she is fretful and exacting, not given to express her gratitude when things are going well—the first to complain of any unavoidable discomfort, which her energetic sisters pass over with a laugh, or feel concerned about solely on her account.

Notwithstanding these unamiable characteristics, both Mademoiselle Delaforet and Mademoiselle Clarisse are genuinely attached to, and proud of “poor Hortense.” She it is who represents the honor and respectability of the family abroad. Her fingers are never soiled with ink, nor show traces of culinary labors. Her dresses are richer and more fashionable than those her sisters can afford themselves. Consequently, upon her devolves the paying and receiving of visits, and the maintenance of a state and dignity befitting the family of a former Maire of Boisy-la-Reine.

It may readily be imagined that for a great occasion like the present, when their salon is not only graced by the presence of the leading magnates of the town, but a real live vicomte—M. de Malsherbes, who possesses a small estate in the neighborhood, has gracefully accepted their hospitality—Mademoiselle Hortense has donned her choicest attire and most courtly mien. Nor need we hesitate to fix upon the little group with which she has contrived to surround herself as the *crème-de-la-crème* of Boisy-la-Reine society.

The portly gentleman, with a wide expanse of embroidered shirt-front, is Monsieur Bouchard—the reigning Maire; and his spouse, the equally rotund dame, with blond frizzled hair, seated beside Mademoiselle Hortense, whose waist she tenderly encircles with a much bejewelled arm.

Facing the two ladies, leaning on the back of a chair in an attitude of studied elegance, stands the Vicomte de Malsherbes. His coal-black hair is cut quite short, and stands up like a brush on his pear-shaped head. An aquiline nose of unusual proportions, which buries itself in a long black mustache, worn with an imperial and pointed at the ends, gives a first impression of aristocratic hauteur and manliness, which the shifty, irresolute expression in his gray-green eyes and the smallness of his chin afterwards dissipates. Nevertheless, the appearance of M. de Malsherbes is decidedly striking, and as he speaks, waving his gibus (the lining of which displays his coronet and monogram in gold and colors) to emphasize his words, or care-



lessly passing his long white fingers through his hair, a silence begotten of admiration and awe falls on the little coterie.

"How charming the bride looked!" he is saying; "never in my life have I beheld a more graceful apparition. Such eyes—such a figure—such a complexion—such lips—such feet! Ah! Mesdames—*le ne vous des que ça!*" Whereupon he joins the tips of his fingers, and carrying them to his lips, impresses a fervent kiss upon them with an expression of indescribable enthusiasm.

"Ah, M. le Vicomte, it is well the bridegroom does not hear you—or he would be uneasy!" cried out Madame Bouchard, wagging her head at him; "and not without cause—eh, mon mari! Poets are always dangerous to us poor women."

Monsieur Bouchard is a ponderous thinker, and not to be entrapped into a sudden expression of opinion. He only stares vacantly at his better half, as though lost in admiration of her profound penetration.

And she, good woman, knowing her husband's peculiarity—one to which he owes in no small measure his present exalted position, since his silence is accounted to him as wisdom among a people who generally talk first and think afterwards—she, taking his assent to her proposition for granted, continues in a tragic whisper: "For my part, although I like him well enough myself, I have my doubts whether this cold-blooded, hard-headed Englishman is the proper sort of husband for such a fiery, impetuous creature."

"Carmen Mendes is a little fool," said Mademoiselle Hortense, with an air of superior wisdom; "and as for Monsieur Danvers—I appeal to you, M. le Vicomte, how can we designate a man who loses his heart through his eyes, and marries a pretty, brainless baby?"

M. de Malsherbes was far too polite to openly contradict a lady, so he arched his eyebrows sympathetically. "How, indeed, mademoiselle?" he began; then stopped and gazed in dismay towards Monsieur Bouchard, from the depths of whose waistcoat a suppressed gurgling sound like the rumble of distant thunder was proceeding.

The old gentleman was still staring fixedly at his wife, but a sudden twinkle of intelligence had come into his beady eyes, and his features were twitching with a convulsive movement. Presently he broke forth into a long, low chuckle, and then seeing that his audience was waiting breathlessly for his utterance, exclaimed, "Parbleu! she is right, my little wife. He would be uneasy—and not without cause!" and then relapsed into silence—a silence which his wife did not leave long unbroken.

As, however, her remarks, although piquant and interesting to her hearers, are principally speculative and baseless, we prefer to cross the room and give ear to the more categorical narrative of the circumstances culminating in this day's proceedings, with which, by special request, the elder Mademoiselle Delaforet is regaling the Church and the Bar, as represented by M. le Curé and Monsieur Goodchaux, the celebrated avocat of M——.



"You must know, then," the old lady was saying, "that some five years ago Monsieur Mendes, a gentleman of Spanish descent, residing in Paris, but reported to have enormous possessions in South America, arrived here with his little daughter Carmen, a child of fourteen, with a view to getting her received into our establishment as an *interne*. He explained that, being obliged to return to Brazil on business which might detain him for an indefinite period, and his child being motherless, he was anxious to find a comfortable home for her, where her education would be attended to, while her bodily comforts were not neglected."

"And that I am sure he found here," exclaimed Monsieur Goodchaux.

"Yes, I hope so, poor child. She was a reckless, fiery little savage when she first came to us, and though I cannot flatter myself that we have succeeded in making her all that we could have wished, still I venture to hope that our civilizing influences were not employed in vain. She is cast in a different mould to our French girls, and, fond as she grew to be of us all, never ceased to chafe under the necessary restraints and discipline."

"Indeed, yes; I remember well, you had sad trouble with her at first," remarked the curé; "she was always trying to run away."

"Yes; and once or twice nearly succeeded. She was passionately attached to her father, although he seems never to have paid much attention to her, but let her run wild like any child in the streets. And when, after two years, he not only failed to fulfil his promise of coming to fetch her away, but all tidings of him actually ceased, poor Carmen went nearly mad, and nothing would serve but that she must try and make her way out to South America by herself, without money and without friends."

"It is quite a romance. I am all impatience to learn how the wild creature of your story became transformed into the lovely and accomplished bride whose nuptials we have had the felicity of celebrating this day," cried the man of law.

"It was almost too romantic for us," replied the lady, smiling at his enthusiasm. "For months we had to watch her like any prisoner, and with all our care she broke away several times. Once we only stopped her at the station, where she had taken a ticket for Paris. Fancy a young creature of sixteen, beautiful as a dream, a perfect woman in person, though a very baby in knowledge of the world, arriving alone late at night in that Babylon! Ah, I shudder to think of it even now, and never cease to thank le bon Dieu that we recaptured our wandering lamb, and brought her back in time."

"What resolution—what a will for a child of that age, even to conceive so daring a project."

"You say well. Even then I doubt if we should have kept her without chains, had it not been for a sudden and violent affection which she entertained for Miss Danvers, an English girl, one of our pupils who had just arrived, and displayed some sympathy with her."

"Ah! so it is her brother, then, that Mademoiselle Carmen has married?"



“No; a cousin, I believe. There is also a romance about the young man. But I fear I am neglecting my other guests. If you will excuse me, I will conclude my narrative later on.” So saying, Mademoiselle Delaforet rose, and, beckoning to her sister Clarisse, joined with her in begging the vicomte to favor the company with a recitation of some of his own verses, a request with which he readily complied.

As we are more interested to learn how Carmen Mendes, the *belle sauvage*, as she was nicknamed by her school-mates, came to be the bride about whom all Boisy-la-Reine was talking, than in listening to the passionate, but very amateurish, declamation of M. de Malasherbes, we will take the liberty of anticipating Mademoiselle Delaforet, and continue the narrative from the point at which she broke off.

Psyche Danvers, when she arrived at the establishment of the Demoiselles Delaforet (three years before the opening of our story), was a blue-eyed, golden-haired, high-spirited damsel of eighteen.

Being the only girl out of a large family of boys, her parents, who resided in Yorkshire, deemed it advisable that she should be sent abroad to receive the finishing polish which is not uncommonly supposed to be best attained out of our own country.

Behind this avowed pretext lay the desire to get her away from the influence of her cousin Vere, a son of Mr. Danvers's elder brother, who had quarrelled with his father, and whom they suspected of nourishing a tender liking for Miss Psyche.

As a matter of fact, at that time the attachment between the cousins amounted to little more than a strong partiality on her part, augmented by a deep sense of the injustice her old playmate had suffered at the hands of his family; while he, smarting under his father's harsh treatment, regarded with the warmest gratitude and admiration the only one of his relations who had the courage to openly espouse his cause.

Vere's father was a wealthy land-owner, who farmed his own estate, and ruled his family with a rod of iron. Essentially one of the old school, both in habits of thought and life, he was imbued with a thorough contempt for all new-fangled notions, and more particularly for that which asserts the reciprocity of duty owed by parents to their children. He regarded his family much in the same light as he did his horses and hounds, with a rough sort of affection; accepting, and even returning their caresses, when they were well-behaved and obedient, but repressing with a promptitude verging on ferocity any attempt to act contrary to his will. A hard man of business and a keen sportsman, he could imagine no delight away from his farms and his kennels; and though well advanced in years, kept a private pack of harriers, with which he hunted the country two days a week all through the season.

His family consisted of two daughters and three sons, of whom Vere was the youngest. One daughter was married to an officer in the army, and at Captain Compton's earnest persuasion the old gentleman had consented to allow his eldest son to enter on a military



career. The second son, James, being a confirmed invalid, and not in any way fitted for a hard out-door life, the squire was reluctantly compelled to permit him to follow his natural bent and take Holy Orders. And this sacrifice he made with better grace, since the gift of the living of a neighboring parish was in his hands, and that from time immemorial it had been filled by some member of the family.

Thus there only remained Vere, who could qualify himself to undertake the management of the estate when the old gentleman should feel called upon to abdicate his position of ruling autocrat.

Unfortunately, the youth had even less inclination for the mode of life his father had laid down for him than his brothers.

His was a thoughtful, romantic nature of disposition, tinged with a deep-seated reverence and love for all that was beautiful and artistic in life, and an equally strong aversion for its hard, cold, matter-of-fact side. Much as he loved the country, the thought of slaving from sunrise to sunset, disregarding of its beauties, and only mindful of squeezing the largest possible amount of labor out of the men, and of crops off the land, was to him inexpressibly repugnant. He had not even the consolation of enjoying the keen, delicious, exhilarating delights of sport. From the time that his legs would reach across a pony, he had hunted at his father's command, but though an excellent horseman, he felt none of the enthusiasm of the true votaries of the chase. The same applied to shooting, and even to the gentler art of fishing. He carried a gun or handled a rod because his brothers did so and his father wished it, but once free from observation, down went fowling-piece or fishing-rod, and gave place to his sketch-book, without which he never stirred abroad.

His mother, a kindly and indulgent old lady, was aware of Vere's artistic yearnings, but regarding her husband as a serf does the Czar of all the Russias, dared not encourage them, and only counselled obedience to Mr. Danvers's behests.

Thus urged, Vere, who besides being of a peace-loving and unselfish disposition, entertained a sincere respect and affection for his father, did his utmost to force himself to take an interest in the career which was thus arbitrarily assigned to him. But after four or five years of patient effort, during which he was constantly at loggerheads with the old gentleman, owing to his want of skill and forgetfulness, begotten of lack of interest in his work, finding the life entirely abhorrent to him, he summoned heart of grace, and laying bare his secret aspirations to his father, begged him to let him follow the only profession for which he felt himself suited.

Had a thunder-bolt fallen at Mr. Danvers's feet, he could not have been more dumfounded. For a moment he was speechless, and then gave vent to his astonishment and wrath in a torrent of oaths, in which such epithets as "ungrateful puppy," "d—d saucy young hound," predominated.

Vere was no coward. Although he stood pale and silent under the lash of his father's tongue, he never faltered from his purpose; and when the vials of the old man's wrath had spent themselves,



returned to the charge, urging his reasons with a quiet determination which brought on another outburst, and ended by his having to leave the room, to avoid a blow from his irascible parent's hand.

After this ensued a period of family discord and discomfort.

Vere refused to resume his distasteful labors. Mrs. Danvers interceded in vain for her son. The old man was inexorable, and at last, sick at heart, and utterly alienated from his father, Vere determined to quit his unhappy home and seek a livelihood for himself with his pencil and brush. He first directed his steps to his uncle's house at Scarboro', where for a while he found shelter and sympathy—especially from Miss Psyche. Vere's father, however, who was as dogged and obstinate as any old hound engaged in the chase, no sooner heard of this than he wrote off, commanding his brother to turn the young rebel out-of-doors. As an inducement to prompt obedience, he offered the post left vacant by Vere to one of his nephews, hinting that, if he proved himself capable and obedient, he might even hope for more substantial favors later on.

John Danvers, who always stood in awe of his self-willed senior, whom he regarded as the head of the house, and considering besides that he had a large family of boys to provide for, easily persuaded himself and his wife that they had no right to run counter to his brother's wishes in this matter, and so politely gave Vere to understand that his absence would be preferred to his continued presence.

Vere was not slow to take the hint and his departure, but not before Miss Psyche had given her parents a piece of her mind, and had publicly promised to correspond with and do all in her power to help her favorite cousin.

Scornfully rejecting the pecuniary assistance which his uncle proffered as a sop to his own conscience, Vere went up to London, and gaining admission to one of the schools of art, managed with his own small savings and the help which his mother, from time to time, was able surreptitiously to afford, to keep body and soul together, and pursue his favorite studies.

Meanwhile, Charlie, Mr. John Danvers's second son, was installed in Vere's place at Danverfield, and Miss Psyche was packed off to Boisy-la-Reine in disgrace.

One of her first actions on reaching the *pension* was to forward to Vere two five-pound notes out of her slender pocket-money, begging him as a favor to paint her some little pictures for her bedroom.

The young man was deeply touched by his cousin's generous behavior, and not many months later Psyche received half a dozen charming sketches, which were the admiration and envy of the entire establishment, and became indirectly powerful instruments in determining Vere's future destiny.



## CHAPTER II.

“One fire burns out another’s burning,  
One pain is lessened by another’s anguish.”

SHAKESPEARE.

THE first few weeks of her sojourn at the Pensionnat Delaforet seemed unutterably dreary to Psyche Danvers. This was her first experience of foreign life, and indeed of boarding-school discipline in any shape or form, and the sense of irksome and unaccustomed restraint was accentuated and imbibited by the recollection of the unhappy circumstances which had led to her banishment.

In spite of a naturally cheerful and self-reliant disposition, when her father bade her a cold good-bye in the school-parlor and left her—the only English girl among a score of giggling, chattering foreigners—Psyche’s heart sank within her, and she knew not where to look for comfort and sympathy.

Her knowledge of the French language being restricted to the feeble smattering imparted by a daily governess at her own home, and consisting mainly of passages from Lafontaine’s Fables, T<sup>él</sup>émaque, and Ollendorfish sentences committed more or less accurately to memory, she found considerable difficulty in making herself understood.

When her school-mates surrounded her and plied her with questions, she could not reply by spouting “Calypso et son île” or “Le Cigale.” Had they asked her “if she had seen the good wife of the industrious gardener,” she could doubtless have retorted with sufficient promptitude, “No; but she had met the wicked baker’s large dog.” But alas! of all the colloquial phrases she had learned at so much pains, not one was applicable to present needs. And so poor Psyche was obliged to remain bewildered and silent, and having no one to whom she could unburden her sorrows, felt desolate and unhappy to the last degree.

Mademoiselle Delaforet, who was kindness personified, was quite concerned to notice the falling off in appearance as in appetite of her new charge. It was just at this period that Carmen Mendes made her most daring attempt to escape; and as, after her recapture, all the other pupils, dreading her violent outbursts of temper, flatly refused to share her room, the old lady, thinking that both Carmen and Psyche, being strangers in a foreign land, they might feel drawn one towards the other, and mutually yield the sympathy and affection for which each was pining, determined to try the experiment. Accordingly, Mademoiselle Dubois, one of the governesses, who, on the strength of having once passed a month at Folkestone, consid-



ered herself an accomplished English scholar, was instructed to sound Miss Danvers on the subject.

Psyche was a quick-witted girl, but it required all her powers of divination to enable her to decipher the meaning of the proposal which her equally puzzled preceptress was endeavoring to explain in a confused jargon of English-French and French-English.

Mademoiselle Delaforet and Mademoiselle Clarisse were present during the interview, and were lost in admiration at the fluency and facility with which their compatriot and subordinate carried on the conversation.

“C’est étonnant! elle a l’accent tout-à-fait Anglais, et des façons insulaires qu’on pourrait s’y méprendre,” exclaimed the head of the establishment, as Mademoiselle Dubois, after insisting on a “shake hands,” commenced the colloquy with, “I hope you are well, if you please, Mees Danvers. Good-day;” although this was by no means their first meeting that morning.

When at last it dawned upon her that the object of all this preamble was to find out whether she would like the beautiful Spaniard to share her room in place of Mademoiselle Dubois herself, Psyche, feeling that she would be more at her ease with a fellow-pupil than with the little fat governess, who made nearly as much noise asleep as awake, gladly consented.

Up to that time she had only caught occasional glimpses of Carmen Mendes, but what little her imperfect knowledge of the language had enabled her to glean from the other girls’ conversation about the “belle sauvage” had awakened in her a strong interest in the woes of her companion in exile. The very audacity of Carmen’s efforts to escape, and the defiant manner in which she submitted to lectures and punishments, respecting neither governesses, school-fellows, nor servants when they angered her, but flying at them with the fearless ferocity of a wild-cat, proved her pluck. And this was a virtue which Psyche, whose code was modelled to no small extent on her brothers’, largely esteemed. Then, too, the thought that Carmen, like herself, was far from home and friends, aroused her ready sympathies, and made her welcome her new companion with a warmth and cordiality of manner which more than compensated for her deficiency of words, and enthroned her at once in the affections of this beautiful, warm-blooded child of the South.

At sixteen, Carmen, in form and perfection of development, was a full-grown woman. Lithe and active as a panther when roused to bestir herself by any of the wayward fancies or gusts of passion to which she was subject, in quiescence she possessed the languid yet stately grace of pose and carriage peculiar to the women of her nation. Her small and beautifully formed head was poised on a neck and bosom of faultless contour, the graceful curves and swelling roundness of which would have delighted the eye of an artist or sculptor. Jet black hair growing low on the forehead, so that its refractory waves almost touched the arched and strongly marked eyebrows, set off a matchless complexion which seemed to have absorbed its delicate coloring from the sun’s rays like a peach grown



on a southern wall. Add to this large, lustrous eyes, flashing so many tints, according to her changing moods, that it was impossible to determine their exact shade of color, fringed with long, curling lashes of the darkest hue, a well-shaped nose, and a mouth large, mobile, and cherry-lipped, equally lovely when armed with kisses or pouting in petulance, and you have a portrait—feeble, doubtless, beside the original, but the best we can paint—of Psyche's new friend.

Carmen was well versed in French, and as this was their only medium of communication, her knowledge of English being a diluted and still more distorted version of that possessed by Mademoiselle Dubois, she set to work with the furious energy that characterized all her actions to instruct her new idol in the language which would enable them to understand each other, and exchange those confidences which form at once the basis and the charm of girlhood's friendship.

Psyche was amused at the dictatorial manner in which her junior took possession of her and ordered her about. She hardly dared to call a moment her own in or out of school-hours. Carmen was always at her side, chattering to her, laughing at her, scolding her or embracing her, as the case might be. "Hâte-toi donc pour que nous puissions nous comprendre et que je te fasse savoir combien je t'aime," she used to exclaim when they were alone; and then, hanging round Psyche's neck, would half smother her with kisses.

In vain Psyche tried to make the acquaintance of the other girls. If Carmen were within sight or hearing, she flew at her friend and dragged her, laughingly remonstrating, away, while in tones of menace, half jesting half earnest, she vowed she would kill any of them who dared to take her Psyche—her angel, from her, or tried to steal her affections.

Naturally warm-hearted and affectionate, Psyche gave way to the girl's wild demonstrations of regard, smiling good-naturedly at her outbursts of jealousy and anger, which she felt bound to regard as complimentary to herself.

Under these conditions their friendship ripened rapidly, and the elder girl grew to take a fond interest in her protégée, making her the confidante of all her little secrets and hopes. As a matter of course, her cousin Vere figured largely in all their conversations; and from hearing him so constantly extolled, he assumed in Carmen's eyes heroic proportions, and became for her the model of all that was noble and lovable in man. His letters, his sketches, the accounts of his struggles and ultimate small successes, were welcomed by Carmen almost as eagerly as by Psyche herself.

Insensibly the young man was being wound into the life of this ardent child-woman, this strange compound of tender susceptibilities and fierce passions, and elevated to the position of chief idol in her easily excited imagination. Like the Athenians of old, she had raised an altar "to the unknown God," and was ready to fall down and worship at his first appearance.

During the two years that Miss Danvers remained at Boisy-la-



Reine the friendship between the two girls was maintained unbroken, save by Psyche's occasional visits to her home in the holidays.

Still Carmen's father made no sign; and as the bankers with whom he had deposited the funds for her maintenance announced that these were exhausted, the poor girl was left a pensioner on the bounty of the Demoiselles Delaforet.

At last the time arrived for Psyche's final departure. She had attained the mature age of twenty, her education was supposed to be completed, and her presence was required at home. Moved by her friend's sad position, the girl pleaded hard with her father for leave for Carmen to accompany her to England. But Mr. John Danvers felt that it would be a dangerous experiment to introduce such a bewitching, penniless creature as Carmen was at eighteen among his boys, and, like the prudent man that he was, positively declined to accede to his daughter's request.

Fortunately for Carmen, Mademoiselle Delaforet was more charitable, and when, after keeping her for more than a year at free quarters, the good lady felt bound to disclose to her her dependent position, she generously offered for her to stay on in the capacity of pupil-teacher, a proposal which Carmen gladly embraced.

Under the softening influence of her affection for Psyche Danvers the girl's disposition had vastly improved. Her nickname, and with it, to a great extent, the fiery outbursts which had earned it for her, had become things of the past; and although her impetuous, fiercely jealous nature had not changed, she had learned, at any rate, to control and conceal her passions, and was worshipped and revered in the school, as much for her beauty as for her position—after Psyche—of senior pupil.

The departure of her dearest friend and the concomitant realization of her own desolate condition induced a state of morbid melancholy, which Carmen made but little effort to shake off. Her spirit seemed utterly broken; and although Mademoiselle Mathilde and her sisters remained unremittingly kind and considerate, and Psyche, faithful to her promise, maintained a constant correspondence, a dark curtain seemed to have descended on her bright young life, which threatened a speedy and tragic termination unless some external effort could be made to lift it, and give her a fresh interest in existence.

Just when Mademoiselle Delaforet was beginning to despair, a combination indirectly brought about by her old pupil, Psyche, produced the wished-for result, and the *deus ex machinâ* appeared in the form of Vere Danvers.



## CHAPTER III.

“Not his the mind to give the rein to dreams,  
He thought in visions, but he lived in acts.”

W. A. GIBBS.

WHEN Vere arrived in London after the rupture with his family, his first object was to find a lodging cheap enough to suit his meagre purse, and within easy reach of the Art School at South Kensington.

Accordingly he inserted an advertisement in the *Daily Telegraph*, and out of nearly a hundred replies selected the residence of a Mr. Moggs, in the neighborhood of Shepherd's Bush, as most likely to fulfil his requirements.

There was something pleasant and arcadian in the sound of “Rose Cottage, Holly-bush Lane,” which immediately took his fancy. Then, too, the terms were moderate—very moderate, taking into consideration the advantages offered by Mr. Moggs, or, as he judged by the handwriting, by Miss Moggs on his behalf. “A widower, with one grown-up son and daughter who plays the piano” (he was not quite clear whether it was the widower or his daughter whose tastes were musical), “can offer a comfortable home, board and lodging, to V. D. on the terms named: cheerful society and use of piano 1s. 6d. per week extra.” So ran the letter. Whether he should decide to avail himself of the “eighteen pennyworth” of cheerful society and use of piano, or not, or whether he could have the cheerful society without the piano for 9d. extra, the offer seemed a tempting one, and led to his making an appointment to call on Mr. Moggs the following evening between 7 and 8 P.M. Vere named this hour because he was given to understand that Mr. Moggs was engaged during the day in the City, and judged that he should arrive after the family tea and before supper, having a well-bred horror of intruding upon strangers during meal-times.

Quitting his gloomy and dirt-begrimed hotel in the neighborhood of Euston Square, with the delightful anticipation of finding a cheaper and more comfortable abode in comparative country, he entered the Underground Railway at Gower Street, and journeyed to Shepherd's Bush.

The first disenchantment which awaited him was, on arriving at his destination, to find that the speculative builder had stretched his octopus-like arms over what was once undoubtedly a quiet country nook—if names mean anything—and converted it into a howling wilderness of bricks and mortar. Labyrinths of streets, countless shops, omnibuses, and tram-cars made the very notion of sheep and bushes ever having found a congenial existence there appear ludicrous.



crously incongruous. Notwithstanding that there was no lack of passers-by from whom he sought to elicit information as to the whereabouts of Holly-bush Lane, Vere wandered for what seemed an indefinite period up one road and down another before he discovered the object of his search in a short, melancholy little street terminating in a cul-de-sac, formed by a dead wall and a large dust-heap.

Holly-bush Lane consisted of about a score of semi-detached, single-story tenements on either side of the road, which presented the charming alternation of ruts, holes, and heaps of stones and rubble, incidental to these kind of newly opened districts, where town and country join, and local authorities are either powerless or supine.

Evening was advancing, but there still remained sufficient daylight for Vere to be able to decipher the words "Rose Cottage" on the door-post of one of the dwellings. His heart sank within him as he compared the Rose Cottage of his imaginings and the actual bare lath-and-plaster villa of the type dear to the jerry-builder (and to the purchaser, too, for the matter of that, only in another sense).

However, having made the appointment and come so far, he felt bound to go in. "After all," he laughed to himself, "one can't expect a palatial lodging for 15s. a week, with breakfast, tea, and supper thrown in, to say nothing of cheerful society and use of piano for the modest additional charge of 1s. 6d. weekly."

Opening the narrow, creaking iron gate, he crossed the few yards of flags which, with half a dozen stunted and soot-begrimed shrubs, represented the front garden, and knocked manfully at the door.

In response to his summons, he heard a heavy tread in the passage, and, after a violent struggle with the badly adjusted latch, the door was thrown open with a force which caused the whole flimsy tenement to tremble and vibrate.

"Blame the door! Why the doose can't they make the things fit?" cried a fat, jolly-looking man in shirt-sleeves, who stood blocking up the narrow passage, and gazing mournfully at the remains of his "church-warden" fractured in the struggle. Then, perceiving his visitor, "I beg pardon, sir; I took you for Betsy—that's our servant—gone for the supper beer. Walk in, do. I suppose you're Mr. V. D.? To tell the honest truth, I'd almost given you up. You're a bit behind time; and then, you know, between you, me, and the bed-post, we've had so many nibbles, and ne'er a bite yet."

Vere was proceeding to explain the cause of his late appearance, when a shrill voice was heard from a room on the right, "Now, pa, don't keep the gentleman standing in the hall; ask him to step into the drawing-room."

Whereupon Mr. Moggs threw open the door, and, bowing ceremoniously, cried facetiously, "'Will you walk into my parlor?' said the spider to the fly."

"Pa, how can you be so silly?" cried the female voice again; and as Vere entered the room he beheld a rather over-dressed young lady with a pasty complexion, washed-out blue eyes, and a profusion of yellow hair cut in a fringe over her forehead, seated at a small round table, and apparently engaged in fancy-work.



"Mr. V. D., my daughter, Miss Victoria Moggs; Miss V. Moggs, Mr. V. D. There, my dear, if I'd been a dook I couldn't have done it better," said her father, wagging his head like a Japanese toy figure.

"You mustn't take any notice of pa. He's always up to his jokes," remarked Miss Moggs, apologetically, rising and motioning Vere to a chair. "I'm sorry our servant is out. We had to send her with a message in the neighborhood."

"With a jug, you mean, to the 'Nag's Head.'"

"You see, we only require one servant, being a small family," continued Miss Moggs, regardless of her father's interruption. "But, of course, if we had a lodger—a gentleman staying with us—and found we wanted another—"

"Want 'ud have to be your master, my love," said the irrepressible Mr. Moggs.

"Really, pa, you are too trying. How can I discuss matters with Mr.—"

"Danvers," replied Vere, politely.

"—Mr. Danvers, if you will keep acting the buffoon? For goodness' sake put on your coat, and try to keep silent for a few minutes."

"That's the way the babes and sucklings trample on us ancients!" cried the funny man, pathetically, but nevertheless doing as he was bid.

After a short conversation, in which the family arrangements were detailed in a business-like manner, the young lady proceeded to show Vere over the house. He remarked amusedly that she called the little back parlor "the dining-room," and the still smaller kitchen "the domestic offices;" but as everything, including the spare bedroom, appeared scrupulously clean and neat, and the girl herself sensible and good-natured, for all her affectation of grand-ladyish airs, he came to the conclusion that he might go farther and fare worse, and willingly accepted the invitation to stay and partake of their supper, which both father and daughter cordially pressed as soon as he announced his intention of becoming their lodger.

"It ain't business to strike a bargain without a wet," said Mr. Moggs, jocularly; "and, besides, you see, sir, looking at it from your point, it's only right that you should have the chance of seeing that we don't starve at Rose Cottage before becoming our boarder."

"I've no fear of that," replied Vere, politely.

"Yes, but it's always better to buy by sample; that's my motter in business, and a good one to stick to. Of course samples are gratis," said his host, wishing to imply, in a delicate manner, that this meal would not be included in the account. Then, turning to his daughter, "What is it to-night, Vic—champagne and oysters, followed by all the delicacies of the season?"

"Sausages and mashed, if you must know, followed by cold mutton and cheese," laughed Miss Moggs.

"Ah well! never mind; I dare say we can manage to make a supper; and there's Betsy come back with the foaming," said her father, hastening to admit the servant with the beer.



On his return, Miss Moggs, after whispering in her father's ear, disappeared into the kitchen department, leaving the two men alone.

"She's a rare good gal, that! A first-rate cook and a capital house-keeper; just like her poor mother. She'd make a tip-top business man," remarked Mr. Moggs, after a short silence. "That reminds me, sir. It's a mere matter of form—but it's customary in these cases to exchange references. I travel for Philpot & Co., of Wood Street. Perhaps you've heard the name? The oldest house in the Manchester line. Worth a mint of money. If you write to the firm, they'll be pleased to tell you all about *me*, for, man and boy, I've been with them nearly thirty years."

Vere hesitated before replying, with a slight flush of embarrassment, "I hardly know to whom I can refer you. My people all live in the North, and I scarcely know anybody in London. Of course, if you insist, I can write to my uncle at Scarborough; but, to tell the truth, I am, unfortunately, not on the best of terms with my family."

"Just as I thought! Directly I set eyes on you, I said to myself, 'It's strange that a young gent of that stamp should want board and lodging at fifteen bob a week.' Perhaps there's a lady in the case?"

"Could we not overcome the difficulty by my agreeing to pay weekly and in advance?" asked Vere, disregarding the too personal interrogatory.

"Why, yes, sir; I think we might in your case. I don't want no telling to see you're a gentleman, born and bred, and if you act honorable by us, we'll do the same by you—references or no."

At this juncture Miss Moggs reappeared, her cheeks aglow from her recent exertions in front of the kitchen fire.

"Augustus cannot be coming home to-night. It's already half-past eight, so I've told Betsy to dish up at once," she said.

"All right, my dear. The young scamp is out on the spree again, I expect. He's a rare trouble, that boy, so fond of theatres and music-halls—like his poor mother. Runs in the blood, I suppose," remarked Mr. Moggs; then, in an undertone to Vere, "Mrs. M. was on the stage before I married her. Charming creature!"

Vere, somewhat embarrassed by these confidences, muttered a few unintelligible words in reply, and followed the young lady into the other room, where the "sausages and mashed" awaited them.

In the course of the evening Vere learned a great deal more about the family and its affairs than he ever expected or even desired to know. But Mr. Moggs was an inveterate talker, and as there were only two subjects in which he took any interest—his children and his business—he naturally gravitated to these whenever his mouth was not too full to speak. However, he displayed so much affection for, and honest pride in both, that Vere, who was himself naturally taciturn and self-contained, could not but admire the happy disposition of the man, and forgave his apparent vulgarity for the sake of the warmth of his heart and the good-natured contentment which shone through all his confidences.



During the past week Vere had been so lonely and uncared for in his miserable hostelry, that the thought of living again under the same roof with people in whom he could find some interest quite gladdened him, and enabled him to shake off some of his usual reserve.

Before he left, he had the satisfaction of feeling that the impression he had made upon his new acquaintances was by no means unfavorable.

Had he heard all the eulogiums which were lavishly bestowed upon him after his departure, he might have recoiled at the notion of having to live up to such a lofty standard as they, in their enthusiasm at having secured so promising a lodger, were assigning to him.

Although only of medium height, Vere's well-compacted frame, which had just attained the full perfection of early manhood, showed unmistakable signs of breeding and strength. The open-air country life that he had hitherto led had bronzed his clear-cut features with the healthy glow so much envied by the pasty-faced dwellers in great cities. His hair, of a darker shade of brown than either beard or mustache, waved carelessly over a finely moulded forehead; while slightly protruding eyebrows and soft, dreamy eyes, of the shade that is termed blue, betokened the artist's soul within.

As to these external advantages he added a pleasant voice and the courtly mien of one who, respecting himself, respects others, it was small wonder that an apparition so unlike all their preconceived notions of "a real swell"—as gathered principally from flashy clerks and transpontine theatres—should have left a marked impression on the minds of Mr. Moggs and his daughter.

On the following morning Vere removed to his new abode, and remained there for more than two years, a valued and respected inmate.

His days were fully occupied in attending the painting-classes at South Kensington, and ultimately at the Royal Academy Schools, where, thanks to his natural talent and persevering industry, he made most satisfactory progress in the art to which he had determined to devote his life and energies.

It was well for him that he had this all-absorbing passion to fill the void created by the painful rupture of home ties and old associations.

He sought, in hard and unremitting toil at his easel, solace from the grief caused by his exiled state. Occasionally a hurried letter, blurred by his mother's tears, came to shake his stern resolution never to darken the parental door again. But pride and a sense of unmerited injury restrained him from making the first overture to his self-willed father.

Besides, he knew that, short of absolute and unconditional submission, no appeal would have the faintest chance of reversing the fiat which had sent him an outcast into the world. And this, even in his softest moments, he was not prepared to make.

The only remaining link that bound him to his old life was the



correspondence which his cousin Psyche contrived to maintain from her place of banishment. Her bright missives, full of tender solicitude for his welfare, and playful narrations of her adventures at the Pension Delaforet, acted like a tonic upon his spirits when the disappointments and moments of discouragement inevitable in any career weighed heavily upon him.

The praises which she lavished upon the lovely woodland scenery in the midst of which Boisy-la-Reine was situated fired his imagination, and filled him with an intense desire to transport himself thither, and make the mysterious beauties of the forest his special study. Then, too, her glowing accounts of the surpassing loveliness and romantic history of her friend, Carmen Mendes, and the more sober, but none the less sincere, admiration which she expressed for Mademoiselle Delaforet and her sister Clarisse, invested the little provincial town with an interest quite apart from its artistic merits.

For a long time, owing to the state of his finances, Vere could see no prospect of being able to gratify this longing. But at last an almost unlooked-for success at the prize competition of Art Students came to gladden his heart and free him from the trammels of grinding poverty. In recognition of his talent, the gold medal and a travelling studency, worth two hundred pounds, were awarded to him.

Hitherto he had been obliged to paint to live. Now he would live to paint, and Boisy-la-Reine should be the theatre of his enfranchised efforts.

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#### CHAPTER IV.

“She was a phantom of delight  
When first she gleamed upon my sight.”

WORDSWORTH.

GREAT was Vere's disappointment on learning from Psyche that, by the time he arrived, she would have taken her final departure from Boisy-la-Reine.

“I can't tell you how sorry I am to miss seeing you,” she wrote; “but poor mother has been rather suffering during the winter, and wants me at home to nurse her. So father is coming to fetch me back next week, and I shall have to say a long farewell to dear, drowsy old Boisy-la-Reine and all my kind friends. Now that I am really going for good, I feel quite sad at the thought of parting from Carmen and the Demoiselles Delaforet. Mademoiselle Mathilde is the kindest, sweetest old lady I ever met; not a bit like an old maid. She says, in fact they all say, that they shall miss me fearfully, and Carmen declares she can't live without me. I hope to persuade my father to let her come and stay with us. It will be so wretched for the poor girl to be left alone; for, out of the whole school, I am the only one to whom she is attached. The girls all used to call me her keeper; and really, when she was ‘la belle sauvage’ to everybody



else (and not in name only), with me she was always loving and affectionate. I have never ascertained the secret of my influence over her; and to this day, although we are the thickest of friends, I confess that her disposition and character are quite beyond my comprehension. Such a strange mixture of good and evil, of violent, ungovernable temper and angelic sweetness, surely never existed. However, if, after all, she remains, you will probably see her for yourself, and be able to form your own judgment about her, though I sadly fear your artist's eye will bias your opinion; for whatever else you may think, I am sure you will be obliged to admit that she is the most lovely and bewitching girl you have ever seen. In any case, mind you call here, as I have told Mademoiselle Delaforet all about you, and she is most anxious to make your acquaintance, and promises to introduce you to all the best people in the town."

Although this letter, which concluded with repeated congratulations and the warmest expressions of cousinly regard, dispelled all hopes of a meeting with Psyche, it did not induce Vere to alter his plans. He had made up his mind to visit Boisy-la-Reine, and any determination once deliberately arrived at he did not easily abandon.

Accordingly, early in May, Vere took leave of the sorrowing Moggs family, and started for Paris.

This was his first visit to the Continent, for his father did not approve of foreign travel, nor indeed of travelling at all. The squire scarcely ever quitted his own estate, except for the chase, or to visit the country town on market-day or during the assizes; and he could not see why the life which had been good enough for himself and his father before him should not satisfy his boys. Furthermore, to insure obedience, he took care while they were under his roof to keep their private allowance of cash so small that they had not the means to wander, however great might be their desire.

Thus, to the delights of a well-earned holiday, Vere's present trip added the charm of entire novelty. He loitered entranced along the gay boulevards, visiting picture-galleries, churches, theatres, open-air concerts, every entertainment, indeed, that was to be enjoyed at not too high a price.

At last, however, as the summer wore on, the increasing heat and stuffiness of the great city made the thought of "leafy glades and forest shades" irresistibly alluring to his parched and jaded senses.

Of all forms of toil masquerading in the garb of pleasure, sight-seeing to most people—always excepting our transatlantic cousins, who appear to be constructed of special wear-resisting fabric—is the hardest and most wearying; and having neither engagements to fulfil nor farewell visits to pay, Vere's resolution to depart was no sooner taken than put into execution. He arrived at Boisy-la-Reine late one Sunday afternoon, and chartered the only conveyance waiting at the station, which proved to be the hotel omnibus. As he drove along, Vere revelled in the sweet, pure woodland air, so different from that he had lately been breathing, and noted with delight the quaint and picturesque villas nestling amid the shade of the forest trees, beneath which white-coated *pères-de-famille* and



proud mothers in Sunday attire watched the noisy gambols of their offspring.

After crossing the two bridges—for the river branched half a mile above the town, forming a large island sacred to bathing establishments and washerwomen—the vehicle lumbered up the hilly main street, and finally clattered into the yard of the “Aigle Noir,” in the Place St. Gudule, with as much whip-cracking and uproar as though it had been a six-horse diligence instead of a modest little omnibus with one solitary passenger.

Vere was saluted at the entrance by a portly personage clad in white nankeen trousers and vest and a black alpaca coat, who was none other than Monsieur Bouchard, the proprietor of the hotel and reigning Maire of Boisy-la-Reine. The fair Madame Bouchard, who did not permit her exalted official station to interfere with her professional duties, sailed majestically out of her little glass-fronted parlor on hearing the omnibus arrive, and welcomed the traveller with that old-school cordiality and courtesy which has so completely gone out of fashion with hotel proprietors of the present day.

As it was on Psyche’s recommendation that Vere had decided to take up his quarters at the Hotel de l’Aigle Noir, he had, of course, been made aware of the high social position occupied by its worthy proprietors, and advanced, hat in hand, to make himself known.

By the same rule, Madame Bouchard had been informed by Made-moiselle Delaforet that a cousin of her charming pupil, the “Mees Anglaise,” would give himself the pleasure of lodging under her roof, and as soon as Vere mentioned his name the good lady broke into rapturous expressions of delight. Wishing to display her knowledge of English customs, she shook his hand repeatedly, calling the while to her husband, “Venez-donc vite Antoine. Voici Milor Danvers qui vient d’arriver de l’Angleterre!”

Madame Bouchard had a powerful soprano voice, and as, in her excitement, she raised it so that her words must have travelled right across the *Place*, and might have been heard on the steps of St. Gudule opposite, Vere was surprised to notice that M. le Maire, instead of rising from his seat under the awning stretched in front of the hotel, merely turned his head, opened his mouth, and gazed vacantly in the direction of his wife. Not so the smokers and drinkers lounging outside the café.

The probability of witnessing a little theatrical display foreshadowed in Madame Bouchard’s words, and the unwonted opportunity for gazing at a *milor* acted like magic upon the assembled citizens and holiday-makers. Cups and glasses were drained, chairs were pushed back, and in the twinkling of an eye Vere found himself the centre of a noisy, chattering crowd, which, however, quickly ranged itself, leaving a clear gangway to the chair of Monsieur Bouchard.

In the mean time that great functionary had risen, and was advancing bareheaded towards the astonished stranger.

“I wonder who the deuce they take me for, and why the old boy pretended not to hear at first?” thought Vere, trying hard to main-



tain his gravity and a demeanor worthy of the occasion—whatever it might be.

Further reflections were cut short, for Madame Bouchard had again seized the young man's hand, and dragging him up to her spouse, exclaimed, in tones of deep solemnity, "Monsieur Bouchard—Monsieur le Maire de Boisy-la-Reine! que je vous présente Milor Danvers."

To which he replied, in equally tragic tones, "La France salue l'Angleterre! Monsieur, soyez le bien-venu;" and then, to Vere's infinite terror and disgust, proceeded to fold him in his arms and impress a warm, moist kiss on each of his cheeks.

A murmur of approval ran through the spectators during the progress of this interesting ceremony, and at its close several enthusiastic citizens began to shout "Vive M. le Maire! Vive le Milor!"

In vain Vere tried to explain, while bowing his thanks, that he was no lord, but only a poor artist. They either did not hear or would not listen, and from that day to the termination of his sojourn in Boisy-la-Reine, he remained "Milor Danvers" to the honest townsfolk.

Meanwhile Madame Bouchard, who, with true dramatic instinct, decided to drop the curtain before the effect of the situation should wear off, signalled to her bewildered guest to follow her into the house, and once there, promptly descended from the lofty pedestal on which she had been posing, and became again the amiable and obliging mistress of the Hotel de l'Aigle Noir.

After dinner, Vere, learning from Madame Bouchard that the Demoiselles Delaforet always received their friends on Sunday evenings, and furthermore, that she herself was going there, and would be glad of his escort, decided to accompany her. Little as he fancied anybody's patronage in the general way, Vere was heartily amused at the combination of motherly and naively grandiose protection which the good lady seemed disposed to extend to him.

Arrived at the Pension, Madame Bouchard and her protégé were ushered into the grand salon, where the three sisters were sitting in state, attended by the resident governesses and three or four of the senior girls. The rest of the company consisted of the Curé of St. Gudule, the medical man attached to the school a (Dr. Bernard), and half a dozen lady visitors—friends of the girls or of the principals.

Vere's entrance was the cause of no small commotion among the little assembly, and for a moment he feared that a repetition of the afternoon's performance awaited him. However, his forebodings were soon set at rest. Mademoiselle Delaforet rose with a pleasant smile, and after a few well-chosen words, to welcome the cousin of her charming Miss Danvers, and of introduction to her sisters, invited him to a seat at her side.

While the old lady was conversing about Psyche's manifold perfections, and the irreparable loss her departure was to them all, Vere's eyes were magnetized by a lovely apparition, seated alone at a small side-table, apparently engrossed in her book. Although placed at a distance from the lamp, which threw her into a half



shadow, Vere had no difficulty in recognizing in the graceful form and pose of the girl before him Psyche's bosom friend and former companion, Carmen Mendes.

Once or twice she looked up from her book and flashed a glance across at him; but this he judged rather from the movement of her head than from any actual perception of her features. While he was wishing earnestly that he could obtain a nearer view of what his artist's eye told him must be a face of surpassing loveliness, if it at all corresponded with the suggestions thrown out by the soft, shadowy outlines, Mademoiselle Delaforet suddenly remarked, "Apropos, Monsieur Danvers, I promised your cousin to present you to her dear friend, who is still with us—Mademoiselle Mendes." Then raising her voice, "Carmen, my dear child, come hither a little moment."

A sudden start, followed by a petulant shrug of the shoulders, was the only reply vouchsafed to this appeal.

"Poor child, she is in one of her humors," murmured Mademoiselle Delaforet, rising and crossing over to her.

Vere, as an amused spectator, could hear the gentle remonstrance: "Carmen! Why didst thou not come? I wished to present thee to the cousin and friend of thy friend."

To which the recalcitrant beauty replied, in the tones of a spoiled child, "If he wants to make my acquaintance, let him come to me. I will not disturb myself for any man!"

"Petite farceuse! Art thou not of an age to abandon such childish ways? What will the gentleman think of thee?"

"Let him think what he likes. I refuse to be made a show of before all these people." And Vere could hear her little foot tapping wrathfully on the polished floor.

"By Jove, what a temper!" he mentally ejaculated. "'La belle sauvage' was not such a misnomer after all."

Presently, after some more whispered entreaties on the part of Mademoiselle Mathilde, which evidently met with a more and more emphatic refusal from Carmen, the old lady returned to Vere, raising her eyes and hands to Heaven in mute protest.

"Mon Dieu, monsieur—Mademoiselle Mendes is in one of her haughty moods; she considers herself insulted because you were not presented to her at first, and declines to leave her seat to make your acquaintance. The best thing we can do is to leave her alone till she regains her senses."

"I am sorry, madame, if I have offended the young lady," began Vere, who, although not at all a *courreur des dames*, felt somewhat piqued at this extraordinary behavior on the part of a girl in whom he was prepared to interest himself for Psyche's sake.

"On the contrary, it is I who should apologize; but I hope monsieur will not think that most of our pupils give themselves such airs. Poor Carmen is an orphan and a foreigner, so we may make excuses for her."

The tender pity expressed alike by the words and in the face of the kind old lady, who seemed not to notice the snub she had re-



ceived from her pupil and dependent, but rather to grieve for the girl's own sake, touched Vere to the quick, and completely blotted out his own growing resentment. "If Mademoiselle Carmen will not come to us, will you kindly take me to her and make my presentation in due form?" he asked.

The old lady smiled assent, and, leaning on Vere's arm, again crossed the room.

Carmen had flung herself into a large velvet-covered chair, and with averted head, and eyes fixed on her book, reclined in a posture which, for all its grace and affected indifference, had in it something stubborn and defiant.

As they approached, Vere could see that the long silken eyelashes which drooped on to her cheek were quivering with suppressed excitement, while her lovely bosom rose and fell rapidly under the thin black dress, the sombre hues of which were relieved by a few bows of amber-colored satin.

We have said that Vere Danvers was no lady's man. His acquaintance with the opposite sex was almost confined to the members of his own family and the fair Miss Moggs. Social intercourse at Danverfield was necessarily restricted, owing to the squire's autocratic and essentially selfish temperament; and in London, where he was totally unknown outside the circle of his student friends, he had had no opportunities for mixing in society and for cultivating that susceptibility to female charms which, as the French say of the appetite, "*Vient en mangeant*." Then, too, although naturally of a romantic disposition, and gifted with a warm and affectionate nature, the circumstances under which he had marked out a career for himself had raised the art, for whose sake he had sacrificed so much, to a position which would admit of no rival.

Hitherto his cousin Psyche had been his beau ideal of what a girl should be. But pretty though she undoubtedly was, what he most admired in her were the so-called masculine virtues—her steadfastness, her courage, and her outspoken truthfulness; and the strong affection in which he held her partook more of the nature of a brother's love than that of a man for a woman.

To Vere, then—unsophisticated to an extent almost equalling that of Galatea when she asked, "What is a man?"—a wild, wayward, passionate, yet supremely lovely daughter of Eve, like Carmen, whose beauty roused all the artistic enthusiasm within him, was at once a mystery and a revelation.

As he stood in front of her chair, patiently waiting for the glance of recognition which she mutinously withheld, her classically shaped head and features appeared to him in profile. The chiaro-oscuro in which she rested lent the charm of softened outline to a form which would well have borne the most searching light.

For the third time Mademoiselle Delaforet was saying, "My dear Mademoiselle Mendes, Monsieur Danvers requests the honor of being presented to you;" and Vere, twice prepared to make his lowest bow and to say something polite, began to grow impatient under this display of studied impertinence or childish bad temper.



An involuntary sarcastic smile of amusement rose to his lips, and he was about to offer to reconduct the old lady to her chair, when, suddenly, Carmen turned round and faced him with a glance full of fury.

"Why do you laugh at me?" she cried. "Are these the manners of an English gentleman?"

Vere was as much perturbed by the marvellous beauty of her flashing eyes as by the suddenness and vehemence of the attack, but he was not going to allow himself to be disconcerted by an angry school-girl.

"Well, really, mademoiselle, I beg your pardon, but I was just about asking Mademoiselle Delaforet if yours are the manners of a Spanish lady—to turn your back on a gentleman who is being presented to you."

"Bravo, monsieur! Well said," ejaculated Mademoiselle Delaforet.

The girl looked him full in the face, as though striving to take his measure. Then, in an injured tone,

"You know you didn't want to make my acquaintance at all. You were forced to. You came because Mademoiselle Mathilde asked you."

"Nothing of the sort. Monsieur Danvers begged me to introduce him," cried Mademoiselle Delaforet; and adding, half aloud, "Ah, well, now that the storm is past, I can leave you two to yourselves," the good lady moved over to her old crony, Madame Bouchard, with whom she was soon enjoying the luxury of a quiet gossip.

"Is that true what she said?" asked Carmen, incredulously, after a long pause, during which Vere continued to smile down at her as though she were some novel and inexplicable mechanical toy. "Tell me; no prevarication."

"Yes," he replied, laconically.

"Will you swear?"

"Certainly not."

"There! I knew it wasn't true. Go away. I won't speak to you;" and she once more turned her back on him.

Thoroughly entertained, Vere laughed softly to himself, and stood his ground.

"They say that France is the home of the drama," he mused; "but I should not have thought it possible that in one day a comedy and a melodrama could have been constructed out of such feeble materials, and that I should have been assigned a leading part in each."

Although her face was buried in the cushions, Carmen was apparently quite conscious of his continued presence.

"Why don't you go? How dare you stand there laughing at me?" she cried, wrathfully, her head still averted.

"You must forgive me, but you are so droll—irresistibly comic;" and again he laughed with intense enjoyment. Never in his life had he seen a grown person act the part of a child to such perfection. He could not be angry with her, still less respectful, any more than



if she had been a pretty nursery rebel of three or four years old, and he an aged relative.

Again she turned on him like a wild-cat, about to spring.

"I hate you—I should like to kill you! *Now*, will you leave me in peace?"

"Halloo! working up for a tragedy," thought Vere. Then, perceiving that this was no simulated passion, and though she spoke softly to avoid arousing attention the girl was in terrible earnest, he bowed politely and quitted her side, more puzzled than ever.

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## CHAPTER V.

"To listen is to yield; no word came back,  
But a bright glance and deeper blush told much."

W. A. GIBBS.

THAT night Vere's dreams were of a peculiarly vivid and melodramatic character, and through them all Carmen—alternately in the angelic and demoniac form—figured predominant.

Once he dreamed that he had been elected Maire of Boisy-la-Reine, and Monsieur Bouchard, robed in purple and gold, and bearing a crown and sceptre, was conducting him to a gorgeous throne in the Church of St. Gudule. Thousands of people were assembled to greet him, and the air was filled with their acclamations, "Vive Milor Danvers! Vive le Maire de Boisy-la-Reine!" Madame Bouchard, clad in tights like a ballet-dancer, was posturing in front of the organ, which Mademoiselle Delaforet was playing with a handle. Suddenly the figure in the altar-piece, representing the Virgin, assumed the form of Carmen Mendes. Her eyes shot fire, her voice sounded like a trumpet. All the spectators fell groaning on their knees, devoutly crossing themselves. "I hate you—I should like to kill you!" she screamed, and, seizing the main pillars of the church, pulled the whole edifice about their ears with a terrific crash!

\* \* \* \* \*

Vere awoke, palpitating and breathless, to discover the *garçon*, who had entered the room with his hot water, sprawling over a chair which, finding neither key nor bolt, he had placed overnight in front of the door by way of precaution.

A swim in the river and a good walk in the forest before breakfast completely dispelled his fantastic dreamings, but none the less, Carmen occupied no small share in his thoughts during the greater part of the day.

His bewildered wonderment that his cousin Psyche, whom he regarded as being gifted with a more than usual amount of common-sense, should have chosen this ill-mannered spitfire for her bosom friend, was only surpassed by the reflection that Mademoiselle Delaforet, who was under no obligation to keep the penniless girl an



hour in her house, yet, in spite of disobedience and rebuffs, treated her with the utmost kindness and consideration.

"I suppose there's something in her that's lovable and charming beyond her mere beauty; because, though I can understand some men being befooled by that sort of thing, her own sex wouldn't be. Anyhow, if she has other graces, she hasn't troubled to display them to me."

Thus Vere reasoned, and then dismissed the subject, deeming it of but small importance compared with the great object of his visit to Bois-la-Reine—the execution of a number of sketches in the neighboring forest, which were to form the nucleus of a series of paintings of woodland scenery on which he hoped to found a reputation.

Although he had been invited by Mademoiselle Delaforet to repeat his visit any Sunday evening when he was so disposed, Vere allowed several weeks to elapse before he again directed his steps to the Pension; and this not so much that he did not care to renew the acquaintance of the kind ladies as that he was withheld by a feeling compounded of pride and bashfulness from seeming to appear an intruder, or too anxious to avail himself of their proffered hospitality. Then, too, he found plenty of occupation in daily excursions into the forest, and in taking rough sketches and notes of picturesque spots which he purposed revisiting later on, when his programme of work should have assumed a more definite shape.

However, a letter from Psyche containing several messages and commissions for Mademoiselle Delaforet and Carmen Mendes necessitated a personal interview, and accordingly, nothing loath, he presented himself again at the school.

As he entered the hall, his ear was struck by the tones of a rich, full, contralto voice, rendering with exquisite taste and pathos one of Schubert's beautiful songs. Although no professed musician himself, Vere knew enough of the divine art to judge that the singer possessed powers of no mean order both of voice and feeling. Touching the maid on the arm to prevent her from disturbing the music by opening the door, he remained in the anteroom an entranced listener, while the singer intoned the second couplet:

"Adieu! tu vas m'attendre  
Bientôt je dois partir;  
Mon cœur fidèle et tendre,  
Te garde un souvenir.  
Adieu, jusqu'à l'aurore,  
Du jour en qui j'ai foi;  
Du jour, qui doit encore,  
Me réunir à toi."

As the last notes died away the servant threw open the door, and Vere caught a glimpse of Carmen standing by the piano with a softened, yearning expression on her lovely face, as though her thoughts were far away with some fondly cherished memory. He asked himself, were these eyes, moist with emotion and bright with the reflection of a loving soul within, the same fiery orbs that had darted



looks of hate and anger on him, a stranger innocent of offence, but three weeks ago? Was it possible that the passionate, unreasonable child could have been thus suddenly metamorphosed into a tender, sentient woman?

Mute with astonishment, he stood in the doorway, forgetful of his errand—of his hostess, indeed—until Mademoiselle Delaforet, attributing his strange behavior to bashfulness, advanced towards him with out-stretched hand and bade him kindly welcome.

This recalled Vere to his senses, and having cordially returned the old lady's greetings, he proceeded to make his bow to Mademoiselle Hortense and the rest of the company.

Turning to address the youngest Mademoiselle Delaforet, who was still seated at the piano, he found himself face to face with Carmen. Doubtful of the reception that might await him, he saluted her distantly, intently watching her the while. A deep crimson flush suffused the girl's neck and face, and her eyelids quivered and drooped beneath his glance as she responded with a low courtesy.

Feeling emboldened by this absence of hostile demonstration, he ventured to address a remark on the song she had just been singing, and to compliment her on her rendering of it.

"Ah, monsieur—then Schubert is a favorite of yours? I am so glad, because my dearest Psyche—Miss Danvers and I, both adore him."

"Yes, mademoiselle, in my humble opinion his melodies are among the most touching and tuneful ever written."

"Carmen, dear, sing us 'Ave Maria,'" said Mademoiselle Clarisse, softly playing the introductory phrase.

The girl glanced swiftly into Vere's face as though asking his assent, and sweetly and quietly, but in tones full of passionate entreaty, began that touching invocation to the Virgin.

Vere stole softly to a chair in a dark corner facing the singer, and sat drinking in the lovely harmonies and wondering within himself how he could reconcile the Carmen of to-day with the vixen of his previous acquaintance. But then, although he had studied seas, skies, and forests in their changing moods, he did not think of applying his knowledge to that most changeful of Nature's productions—a young girl—or the mystery might have been solved.

It happened that he was the only outside visitor on this evening, so that less formality and rigid decorum prevailed than on the previous occasion. After delivering his cousin's message to Mademoiselle Mathilde, he was able to enter into a friendly *tête-à-tête* converse with Carmen.

Of course Psyche formed the main staple of their discourse, but, although no reference was made by either to their former unpleasant *rencontre*, Carmen allowed the conversation to turn on herself and her past life; and while describing the agony of black despair under which she at times labored, from the loss of her father and her dearest friend, managed to suggest an apology for her conduct, which Vere readily accepted.

When she was so minded, Carmen could be a very model of sweet-



ness and amiability. A child of impulse, subject to sudden and violent transitions from sunshine to storm—like the land of her birth—this same versatility of disposition lent an additional charm to her softer moods. With her, every action, every expression was natural and spontaneous, and although, in the abstract, the entire absence of self-control was an irremediable blot on her character—regarded in a purely æsthetic light—she was the more perfect for her imperfections.

When they parted that evening, Vere no longer marvelled at the interest and affection which this beautiful chameleon inspired in all those on whom she deigned to smile. Unknown to himself, the subtle sorcery of her charms had made its influence felt in his heart; and although he pooh-poohed the notion of love, and told himself that he would have no other mistress than his art, the spell was cast, and he was no more able to free himself than Merlin, when the wily Vivien wrought the charm—

“With woven paces and with waving arms,

\* \* \* \* \*

From which was no escape for evermore.”

For some time after this meeting, Vere, deluding himself with the belief that this newly awakened interest was due to a cousinly desire to carry out Psyche's behests by befriending her friend, and also, perhaps, to an artist's admiration of the beautiful, continued to present himself at the Pension on Sunday evenings with considerable regularity.

Carmen, who was predisposed to elevate the young artist to a dangerous pre-eminence in her mind, felt with keen delight the growing influence which she exerted over him.

As with him, so with her—up to now it had been no question of love. She knew as little or less of men than he of women, but her woman's heart was craving for some object on which to lavish its pent-up affections. And although at the first meeting he did not come up to her expectations, nay more, had seemed to her, in her over-wrought state, wanting in respect and common courtesy, when she came to know him more intimately, to compare him either in person or in manner with the few middle-aged citizens of Boisy-la-Reine of whom her circle of male acquaintance was composed, she felt that here was an object worthy of her adoration, and fell to worshipping him accordingly.

Nevertheless she was woman enough, for all her childish impetuosity and openness of character, to conceal from him, and, as she thought, from others, this growing affection which was fast becoming an irresistible passion; and not unfrequently she strove to cloak it under an assumption of studied indifference, or even of active dislike.

Preoccupied with his work, and extremely diffident of his own powers of attraction, Vere did not discover this open secret. Made-moiselle Delaforet was not so obtuse.



The good lady, in whom the long duration of the celibate state had by no means destroyed that interest in Cupid and his ways inherent in her sex, was tenderly attached to Carmen, and feeling how utterly unsuited she was for the humdrum monotony of a teacher's life, had often cast about for a suitable husband, to whose care she deemed the girl's happiness would be most safely intrusted. But Carmen had no *dot*, and without that no Frenchman dreams of marrying.

From the moment of Vere's arrival Mademoiselle Delaforet—who understood that Englishmen were more romantic, or, at any rate, less exigent on this score—built her hopes on him; and when she found he was good-looking, clever, well-born and well-behaved, her kind heart went out to him as the destined protector of her orphan charge.

Many a talk did she and Madame Bouchard hold over the prospects of the match.

As to his means they did not trouble their heads. Were not all Englishmen more or less millionaires? And though Monsieur Danvers did paint pictures for sale, many of his rich countrymen followed more extraordinary pursuits for the sake of some caprice or fancy, even to the extent of spending their days and their money in the hunting of foxes, when a snare or a gun would destroy the vermin without trouble or expense.

Thus, instead of any obstacles being put in the way, the young people were designedly, although secretly, encouraged in their intercourse.

One Machiavelian idea, emanating from the fertile brain of Madame Bouchard, was hailed with ecstasy by Mademoiselle Delaforet as likely to forward her favorite scheme; and this was that Vere should give Carmen lessons in drawing and painting.

As the winter approached, Vere, finding himself restricted in his out-door excursions, and time hanging rather heavily on his hands, had asked his hostess whether she thought there would be any probability of his getting a few pupils in the town. To which Madame Bouchard replied that her influence and recommendation were entirely at his service, but that she would first consult Mademoiselle Delaforet on the subject.

Just at this time the drawing-master attached to the Pension was incapacitated from carrying on his duties by an attack of rheumatism, so that Mademoiselle Delaforet, who, apart from her own wishes on the subject, had a very exalted notion of Vere's powers, felt no scruple in proposing that Vere should temporarily fill his place.

Although these were not quite the class of students he had wished to secure—for there seemed to him at first something derogatory in teaching a parcel of school-girls—Vere thanked the old lady kindly for her offer, and promised to give his answer in a few days.

Meanwhile, Mademoiselle Delaforet had artfully mentioned the subject to Carmen, and the next time Vere called, the girl expressed so much delight at the prospect of having him for a master, that he felt constrained to consent to the arrangement.

Pleasantly, for the teacher and for one at least of his pupils, sped the hours devoted to the lesson. How pleasant they had been, and



what a tender feeling the community of interest had fostered in both their hearts, perhaps neither fully realized until the spring came, and with it an interruption to this delightful arrangement.

In the first place, Monsieur Duval, the ancient professor, was sufficiently restored to be able to resume his position; and, secondly, Vere had occasion to go to Paris to try and arrange for the exhibition or sale of some of his pictures.

Not being in actual need of the money to which he was entitled for the lessons, Vere insisted on dividing it with Monsieur Duval, who could ill afford the loss of six months' earnings; and he, in return, furnished the young man with letters of introduction to some of his confrères and several art critics in Paris.

Thus armed, Vere prepared for his departure, but, before starting, came to bid adieu to the Demoiselles Delaforet and his late pupils.

Carmen was terribly depressed that evening, and the soft, sad expression in her eyes, when she bade him good-by, went straight to his heart, and revealed the secret he had so long ignored.

Disregardful of the proprieties, she had followed him into the anteroom with some last small commission.

They stood, hand-in-hand, near the door. "Au revoir, Monsieur Danvers; do not remain too long in beautiful Paris, and, above all, do not forget us while you are away." Although she tried to smile, there was a tone of subdued melancholy in her voice that moved Vere strangely. Almost unconsciously he bent forward, and, gazing fondly into her tell-tale eyes, impressed a kiss on her forehead. "Good-by, my darling. It is not for long; not longer than I can help, believe me, now that I know what awaits me on my return." Then, fearing to get her into trouble by detaining her longer, he tore himself away and sped back to the hotel, full of new and delicious hopes and dreams of future happiness.

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## CHAPTER VI.

"She's beautiful, and therefore to be woo'd,  
She is a woman, and therefore to be won."

SHAKESPEARE.

VERE started for Paris by an early train on the following morning, and throughout the journey his mind was fully occupied in taking count of the new aspect of his affairs consequent upon the engagement to which he had so unpremeditatedly committed himself.

That his reflections were entirely pleasant we hardly dare assert. Looked at in the cold, matter-of-fact light of day, his action of the previous evening seemed, to say the least of it, extremely rash and imprudent.

True, when he recalled Carmen's rare beauty, her grace, and what had appealed more than either to his innate chivalry, her helpless



position, his heart told him that to have left unanswered her mute and involuntary entreaty for a return of her affection would have been cruel and unmanly. And yet, urged Reason, to engage himself to a penniless girl while he was still struggling for a bare existence, savored more of romantic Quixotism than of worldly wisdom.

He appeared to himself alternately the happiest man in the world or the most foolish, according as sentiment or reason gained the upper hand in his mind; but throughout the conflict no thought of trying to shuffle out of the engagement dared even to present itself. With all his faults and failings, Vere was the soul of honor; and although the few hurried words wrested from him by the girl's sudden emotion and trouble, under circumstances which would have inflamed a colder and less impressionable imagination than his—words to which, indeed, no actual response had been given—might readily have been explained away, he regarded himself as irrevocably bound.

The only debatable points in his mind were, whether he could make her happy, and whether she would be content to share a lot which, for the present, at any rate, offered small prospects of ease and luxury.

That Carmen loved him deeply and truly he had no doubt. All her past words and actions, viewed in the light of this sudden revelation, pointed to that. And the thought that he, without, so to speak, any effort on his own part, and with nothing in particular to recommend him, should have gained the affections of so lovely a creature, filled him with a strong sense of gratitude not unmixed with wonder.

Whether these sentiments and his unbounded admiration of her personal attractions constituted the love which alone justifies a life-long union, he scarcely stopped to inquire. He had hitherto given so little thought to the subject, had, indeed, so wrapped himself in the belief that he was never likely to enter the "blessed state," that when he suddenly found himself vanquished by the charms against which he had thought himself proof, he simply marvelled at his former blindness and bowed to the inevitable.

Arrived in the great city, his preoccupation was forced to give place to more present and pressing interests. Nevertheless, the silken thread of his first romance clung about him, and he found a secret delight in hugging to himself the belief that, though cold indifference and disappointment might await him here, in the little forest town not so many leagues away a tender maiden-heart was hoping and praying for his success.

And it seemed, indeed, as though the charm was gifted with a peculiar potency. Thanks to the interest of one of the art critics to whom Monsieur Duval had recommended him, Vere was able to dispose of some of his pictures at prices which far exceeded his modest anticipations; and, what was even more encouraging, he received before he left Paris several other commissions on terms which made the prospect of matrimony no longer the risky adventure it had at first appeared.



Emboldened by his success, he returned to Bois-la-Reine filled with delightful anticipations of the pleasure of sharing it with Carmen, and hearing from her lips the sweet avowal he had read in her eyes.

Nor was he to be disappointed. His first visit was to the Pension, where he solicited and obtained an interview with Mademoiselle Delaforet, to whom he frankly communicated his hopes and wishes. Knowing, as we do, the kind old lady's sentiments, it is needless to say that she joyfully acceded to his proposed *fiançailles*. Nevertheless, she felt bound by her conscience to inform him that, to all intents and purposes, Carmen was an orphan, and without a sou of her own in the world—a fact of which he was already aware.

"Of course," she said, in conclusion, "we shall supply her trousseau, and see that everything is done *en règle*, for I love the dear child as though she were my own. You will believe me, Monsieur Danvers, when I assure you that, did I not think it was for her happiness, I would never part with her."

"I am sure of that," replied Vere, simply. "Your generous conduct hitherto has amply proved it; and I, for my part, will do my utmost to make her never regret leaving such kind friends."

"There is only one thing more. I suppose, as a matter of form, I must acquaint Monsieur Mendes's former solicitors of her proposed change of state. I know they believe him to be dead, although, as far as I am aware, no certain proofs exist."

"As you like, chère mademoiselle; only you will not ask me to wait their reply before seeing Carmen?" pleaded Vere.

Mademoiselle Delaforet hesitated, and then replied, "I see no reason why you should wait. As I said, it is simply a matter of form; they have no power either one way or the other." Then adding, "Excuse me one moment, I will send the dear child to you," she quietly left the room.

Vere remained gazing dreamily out of the window until a slight movement at the door caused him to turn round—and Carmen was before him.

There was a bright, happy look in the girl's eyes, which flattered him more than the most consummate assumption of coyness or innocence could have done, since it proved her faith in him.

"I am so pleased you are come back," she said, advancing with out-stretched hands.

"Carmen, dearest, is it true?" and the young man clasped both the little hands in his.

"Do you doubt it? I have thought of nothing but of you since you left." And her eyes sought his without shyness, but without boldness.

"Then you do love me?" asked Vere, drawing her to him.

Her head drooped on his shoulder, and she nestled close up to him like a lost child who has found its protector.

"I have *always* loved you—even before I knew you—"

Mere words were powerless to express the young man's feelings; but the passionate kiss he pressed upon her lips sufficed for a reply—or her face belied her thoughts.



Just then Mademoiselle Delaforet, who thought the young people had been long enough alone, entered the room, after considerably fumbling with the handle. "After all," she argued, smiling to herself, "because I have not enjoyed the sweets of love, that is no reason why I should grudge these poor children their little hour of bliss." And although she did break in upon them and interrupt their raptures, it was only from a sense of duty, and to offer her warmest congratulations and good wishes.

People say, "Sour as an old maid!" but they forget how many are sweet and unselfish and devoted, like dear old Mademoiselle Delaforet; or how many women who have exchanged the marriage vow sometimes fail in all these virtues.

We do not propose to dwell in detail on the happy summer months of the young couple's engagement, because either our readers have gone through a similar experience, and need no telling, or else they have not, and the description might fall flat. After all, courtship is essentially a duet for private performance only, and, like amateur theatricals, yields more gratification to the performers than to the audience, however well disposed.

Suffice it to say, then, that the short and rare interviews, *entre quatre yeux*, which the rigid etiquette of our neighbors allows to affianced lovers, were occupied, more or less, in the regulation manner, and appeared, perhaps, all the sweeter for their rarity.

There were no impediments to their speedy union, and Vere, feeling that this state of feverish excitement was detrimental to his work, persuaded Carmen to fix a day early in August for the nuptial ceremony. Before doing so, however, he wrote to inform his mother of his intention, and to ask her blessing on his union, leaving her to communicate the intelligence to his father or not, at her discretion.

As a matter of course, Psyche was aware of the impending event, for she had been the first to receive, through Carmen, the news of their engagement, and Vere still regarded her as his natural confidante and staunchest friend.

Of Psyche's personal feelings on the subject we shall treat later on; but, putting these aside, as the girl did herself when the interests of those she loved were concerned, we may mention that she was by no means so assured of the future happiness in store for the affianced pair as they themselves seemed to be. And this, having known Vere from her earliest childhood, and reading his character like an open book, she judged mainly from the tone of his letters.

True, he expressed himself proud beyond measure of the lovely girl who had consented to be his wife. Nor did he fail to paint in glowing colors the rapture and comfort of having a home of his own, and a sympathetic companion always at his side to inspire his brush and lighten the load of loneliness which so often had weighed him down in his former solitary existence. But of love for her, for her own sake—of that irresistible, unalterable devotion which merges itself in the object of its adoration and loves because it cannot help loving; in few words, of a love such as a man like Vere should feel



towards his wife, he gave no sign. And Psyche, noting this, and having had experience of Carmen's capricious yet exacting affection, was fearful lest, like the seed that fell on stony ground, their happiness might wither because it had no root.

Had her feelings towards her cousin been other than they were, she might have ventured to utter a word of caution. But modesty, the dread of appearing meddlesome and impertinent, and, above all, distrust of her own perspicacity, restrained her. And so, although with an aching heart, she contented herself with sending her warmest felicitations, accompanied by a handsome present.

At last the long-looked-for day arrived. Boisy-la-Reine was *en fête*, for the Demoiselles Delaforet had determined to do everything in their power to make the wedding of their lovely *protégée* a success, and their efforts were warmly seconded by Madame Bouchard. Notwithstanding Vere's protestations, a measure of civic state attended the signing of the *contrat de mariage* at the Mairie, while the religious ceremony in the ancient church of St. Gudule was likewise celebrated with unusual pomp.

After the *déjeuner*, the bridal pair took their departure for Paris, where they were to pass the *lune de miel*; and this brings us to the point at which our story opened.

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## CHAPTER VII.

"Beauty soon grows familiar to the lover,  
Fades in his eye, and pales upon the sense."—ADDISON.

THE reasons which induced Vere to spend his honey-moon in Paris were manifold. In the first place, it was Carmen's predilection, for she had lived long enough in France to become imbued with that magnetic attraction which the glittering city exercises over all provincials, and regarded the prospects of a fortnight's gayety and amusement, after her four or five years of scholastic routine in Boisy-la-Reine, with unbounded delight. Then, too, for his part, Vere shared the Englishman's dislike to be pointed out and smiled at as a *nouveau-marié*—a distinction of which our neighbors, on the contrary, are generally proud—and he considered that they would be more likely to pass unremarked in Paris than in any of the watering-places or other fashionable resorts. Besides, he had a practical object in view in visiting the metropolis, which was to wait upon his patrons in the hope of further commissions.

For all his romantic turn of mind, there was a considerable amount of common-sense in Vere's composition, and he felt that he must not allow the blissful ecstasies of his novel state to blind him to the fact that he had now two mouths to feed instead of one.

Therefore, although Paris in August is no longer Paris to the true Parisian, it still offered sufficient attractions to the bridal pair. It



was a treat to witness the childlike delight which Carmen found in gluing her little nose against the windows of the seductive shops in the Palais Royal or the Rue de Rivoli, and her unrestrained admiration of the various entertainments to which her devoted husband conducted her; while a drive in the Bois, followed by a little repast at Ledoyen's, realized her most exalted notions of earthly bliss.

Only a few small clouds appeared to dim the sunshine of their trip, and to these Vere resolutely shut his eyes, trusting to time and the influence of the love Carmen bore him to eradicate the defects in her character which gave rise to them. But although he considerably forbore to introduce lessons of economy into their short holiday of pleasure, he noted with some dismay that Carmen appeared to have not the slightest idea of the value of money, or else to be under an erroneous impression as to the elasticity of their income.

It grated against his feelings to have to say a decided "no" to her requests for leave to purchase the multitudinous dresses, jewels, or knick-knacks which took her fancy; and to avoid the sight of her face of childish disappointment, in which surprise, anger, and grief were alternately depicted like dissolving views, he often sanctioned an expenditure which he knew was neither necessary nor prudent.

Another source of anxiety was the undisguised admiration which her beauty called forth whenever she appeared in public, and the evident delight her triumphs afforded to her.

*Autre pays—autres mœurs*; and Vere, who shared our insular prejudices against audible personal remarks and bare-faced scrutiny, however flattering (exception being made apparently in the case of Royalty), could hardly repress his feelings of annoyance and disgust at the behavior of our more volatile neighbors under the influence of his wife's attractions. When the young couple drove in the Bois, their fiacre was the cynosure of all eyes, and the identity of the beautiful stranger the evident topic of the assembled loungers. Even the *demi-mondaines* could not repress a curiosity, not entirely devoid of anxiety, at the apparition of this new and startling constellation. At the theatre their *baignoir* was almost as much the focus of the opera-glasses as the stage itself, and nothing but Vere's muscular and determined appearance prevented enterprising gallants from essaying to make the closer acquaintance of the *belle inconnue*.

They occupied a modest apartment in a small *hotel meublé*, in the Quartier St. Honoré, where Vere had stayed on a previous visit, and to this, by some means, they had evidently been traced by one of the more ardent philanderers. On one occasion, when Vere returned after a morning's absence on business, he discovered Carmen in delighted contemplation of a magnificent bouquet. "Oh, Vere, just look at this! Isn't it beautiful—isn't it charming! Who could have sent it?" she cried, as he entered the room.

"Can't you guess?" he asked, forcing a smile, as the determination flashed through his mind to avoid destroying her childlike innocence by enlightening her on the world's wicked ways.

"How should I? The concierge brought it in, saying it was left for me by a gentleman. Who can it be? I am dying to know."



"Silly child! Who should it be but your loving husband? Who else do you suppose would squander his substance on a staid and sober matron of ten days' standing?"

"I don't believe you; and shall I tell you why? The concierge said a strange gentleman drove up in his carriage with a coronet on the panels—just think of that!—and after inquiring if madame, the beautiful wife of the English gentleman, was within, sent me the flowers with his respectful homage. Now, monsieur, what do you say to that?"

Vere had a hard struggle to keep down his rising wrath at this act of impertinence, but he succeeded, and again forcing his unwilling tongue to deviate from strict veracity, replied, jokingly,

"You little coquette! It gives you more pleasure to think a present is from a stranger than from me. Fie upon you!"

"Not so, but you are so prudent I am sure you would never waste so much on a bouquet. Why, only yesterday you refused me a bonnet which did not cost half the money."

"Because you have plenty of bonnets already to last for a year and more. But if you must know, *petite curieuse*, I expect the gift is from one of my art patrons. M. de Belleville knows I am in Paris, and no longer a happy bachelor. It is very kind of him. I must call and thank him—"

"Take me with you, *do*, Vere. I should like to know some nice men—I know so few—except you."

"Well, well, we will see," he replied, with a shade of impatience. "Give me the flowers; you will squeeze them all to pieces. I will ask the concierge for a vase to put them in."

Carmen yielded up her prize with a little air of sulkiness, not liking the peremptory tone in which he had for the first time addressed her, and when he had left the room, flung herself into a chair, feeling ill-used and out of temper.

Meanwhile Vere, on his way down to the concierge, discovered concealed among the folds of paper which encircled the bouquet a card bearing the inscription,

"Le Baron Arthur de Beaulieu,  
"Avenue de l'Impératrice,  
"Champs Elysées."

And on the reverse side,

"Présente ses hommages respectueux, et espère bientôt se permettre de les offrir en propre personne."

"Confounded puppy! He'd better try it on, that's all!" exclaimed Vere wrathfully, more than half inclined to drive off to the Avenue de l'Impératrice, and fling the offending flowers into the baron's face. However, when he learned from the concierge that his would-be rival was only a beardless boy, he contented himself with enclosing a couple of napoleons in a note, worded as follows: "Mr. Vere Danvers thinks M. de Beaulieu must have made some mistake in the



address of his floral offerings, and as the bouquet is somewhat damaged, he returns its value, with the request that M. de Beaulieu will be more circumspect in future."

The despatch of this missive caused a speedy subsidence of Vere's wrath, and he returned to Carmen, comforting himself with the reflection that in a few days they would be safely installed at Boisyla-Reine, well out of reach of similar annoyances.

A few caressing words, and the offer to escort her on a visit to her beloved shops, soon restored Carmen's equanimity, and although the bouquet graced their table during the remainder of their stay in Paris, neither adverted to its mysterious advent—Vere because he thought it wiser to let sleeping dogs lie, and Carmen because her little head was full of her approaching return to the home of her girlhood in the guise of a dignified matron.

Vere was much entertained by the intense importance with which his bride invested their approaching entry into Boisyla-Reine society, and by the earnestness with which she solicited his advice in matters appertaining to her choice of costume for the occasion. Although habitually he took little notice of feminine attire, and considered that she was best dressed whose habiliments excited the least remark, Vere bent himself to his wife's humor. He made her appear before him in all her new costumes, declaring, as a final judgment, that she looked so nice in all or any that he really could not form an opinion as to which suited her best.

This was the sort of flattery that Carmen loved, and she rewarded him with a thousand caresses and tender protestations of affection. And Vere feeling his happiness secure, the little flaws in her character, which had made themselves apparent during their short conjugal life, faded into insignificance.

"She is a dear, impulsive, warm-hearted girl, too young as yet to understand fully the responsibilities of married life. But she'll grow into them, and meanwhile I must act father, mother, and husband in one, and try to remember the sort of treatment that children require. Even if she has the faults of childhood, she possesses all its graces and virtues, and, above all, its freshness and enthusiasm." Thus he reasoned within himself, and in these words he concluded a long letter to Psyche, dated from Paris the day before their departure. This was in reply to one from his cousin announcing the receipt of an unlooked-for invitation to Danverfield, which, as her mother was restored to health, she had been able to accept, and from which she hoped good results might ensue.

At the suggestion of Madame Bouchard—who, to her extended personal knowledge of her native town, added a fund of local information which qualified her for a walking registry—Vere had rented a small *châlet*, situated on the estate of M. de Malsherbes, a few kilometres out of Boisyla-Reine. This *châlet*, which was little more than a cottage, consisting of five or six small rooms, stood on a wooded slope at a considerable height above the river. The front windows commanded an extensive view of gleaming water and gently undulating hills. At the back and on either side the tall dark



firs and pines closed round the little clearing on which the chalet stood, isolated from the world and the "busy haunts of men."

A very Paradise for an artist, it had seemed to Vere, when he had first driven over with Madame Bouchard to call on M. de Malsherbes and to obtain permission to see over the little property.

The vicomte, whose income by no means corresponded with his rank, was overjoyed at the prospect of obtaining a tenant for his unoccupied cottage, and expressed his willingness to treat with Vere on very reasonable terms. Accordingly, Vere had persuaded Mademoiselle Mathilde and Carmen to accompany him on a second visit of inspection shortly before the wedding; and, as his future bride seemed equally delighted with the place, he had taken it furnished for six months, having the option of renewing the tenancy at the termination of that period.

Beaurivage—by which appellation the chalet was known—had been erected many years before, when the family fortunes were in a more flourishing condition, by one of M. de Malsherbes's ancestors, as a sort of dower house, or private residence, for superannuated female relations. Consequently, although the rooms were small, the style and antiquity of the decorations and furniture elevated it above the mushroom bourgeois villas with which Boisy-la-Reine abounded. The black oak panelling and carved ceilings of the *salle-à-manger*, and the faded tapestry and gilded chairs of the *salon*, lent an air of distinction to the tiny apartments, still further enhanced by the profusion of coronets carved on the high-backed chairs or embroidered on the well-worn silken cushions.

At a distance of only a few hundred yards, although completely hidden from view by the intervening trees, stood the Château de Malsherbes, a long white structure surmounted by a lofty, peaked, and gabled roof. The main building was shaped like half an octagon, and flanked by two square towers, over each of which the family emblem—a griffin rampant—was proudly displayed on an enormous zinc weathercock.

A small chapel and a number of out-buildings helped to swell the mass, and, viewed from afar, the residence of the Vicomte de Malsherbes presented a decidedly imposing appearance.

A nearer inspection, however, dispelled all grandiose notions.

Three-fourths of the rooms were shut up and unused, and notwithstanding its charming situation and surroundings, and the many interesting relics of decayed grandeur in which the château abounded, Vere felt that he would not have exchanged the little unpretending chalet, with its capabilities of comfort and homeliness, for its more important neighbor, even if he could have occupied it on the same terms.

Anxious to obtain the first view of the returning bride and bridegroom, in whom they felt a sort of proprietary interest, Mademoiselle Delaforet and Madame Bouchard met them at the station in one of Monsieur Bouchard's carriages, and they all four drove in state through the suburb which lay on that side of the river, and up the sandy winding road leading to Beaurivage. Although the chalet



stood within the park boundaries, it could be approached by a small forest track, which opened into the high-road half a mile beyond the grand entrance to the château. As the carriage was passing the great iron gates, M. de Malsherbes suddenly appeared, hat in hand, and offered his felicitations, expressing at the same time a hope that their new residence would be to their satisfaction, and that he might be allowed to pay them a visit in the course of a few days, in order to assure himself that all was as it should be. Naturally, Vere replied that they should be delighted to see him; and after the exchange of a few more complimentary phrases the carriage drove on.

Having seen the young people safely installed at the chalet, the ladies considerably took their departure and left them to settle down in their new home.

Carmen was charmed beyond measure with the place and everything belonging to it, fluttering about from room to room with the delighted eagerness of a child examining a box of new toys. It was continuously "Oh, Vere! have you seen this lovely clock?" or "Come quickly, Vere, I want to show you the sweetest little cabinet," and so on, until he laughingly declared that she would leave herself nothing for future amusement, and forced her to abandon her quest, and accompany him on a stroll in the cool, inviting forest, from which they were only separated by the park palings.

"What a blessed relief after the heat and noise and smells of Paris!" exclaimed Vere, sniffing delightedly the pleasant odor emitted by the pine-trees, and gazing entranced at the glorious sunset effects just visible through the tops of the trees.

"Yes, it is nice," chimed in Carmen, but less enthusiastically. She was thinking regretfully that her charming costume of *gris de perles* was wasted on the desert air.

"Compare this velvety moss with the burning asphalt, these lovely rides striped in gold and shadow with the noisy, dusty streets, and tell me honestly if country is not preferable to town?"

"Well, yes, perhaps, for some things. But then, Vere, there are no shops."

"No shops! You little Philistine, to dare to think of man's trumpery gauds when Nature's whole stock-in-trade of romantic charms and beauty is spread out before you. Surely my Carmen has a soul above shops."

"It's all very well for you, being an artist, to rave about Nature and scenery; but if you want my honest opinion, I prefer the life and gayety of Paris to the gloomy solitude of the forest—beautiful as it is," replied Carmen, more than half inclined to be vexed at his banter.

"Well, dearest, we won't quarrel over our little differences of taste," said Vere, good-humoredly; "but since we cannot afford to live in a great city, and the forest has to be our home, I hope you will learn to love it, or, at any rate, to be happy in it, till I have made a fortune, and can provide you with another residence more to your taste."

Instantly Carmen relented, and, in a fit of penitent affection, flung



her arms round Vere's neck, exclaiming, "So that my husband loves me, I shall be happy anywhere. You do love me, Vere, don't you, for all my naughty, silly ways?"

"Of course I do, child," he replied, gently disengaging her arms. At no time partial to heroics, he did not like to appear to encourage his wife's tendency to enact emotional scenes about mere trifles. Then, to change the conversation, he added, "It is almost time to turn back. Much as I like the forest, I don't want to have the dinner spoiled."

Carmen flashed a look up at him from her large dark eyes, in which, had he seen it, he might have read the grief and surprise of a child whose advances are overlooked and rejected. But she only said, shortly, "I am ready, let us return," and led the way back through the darkening trees.

The influence of her passion for Vere was still strong upon her. Perhaps, too, the strangeness of her new state helped to repress the rebellious feelings which were surging in her breast, and prevented her from giving them vent as she would formerly have done in an outburst of passion. Nevertheless, she felt hurt and outraged at what she considered his cold, careless treatment; and although by the time she reached the chalet the storm had spent itself, the seeds of a suspicion had been sown that his love for her was not so all-absorbing as hers for him—seeds which were destined to take root and bring forth jealousy and all its attendant miseries.

Meanwhile Vere, unconscious of his offence, loitered slowly behind her, stopping to enjoy the lovely peeps to be caught, through the narrow archways of verdure, of the river, flashing like a stream of molten gold in the rays of the setting sun. When at last he entered he found that Carmen had nearly completed her toilet. Remarking an appearance of recent tears in her eyes, his conscience smote him, and he hastened to inquire the cause. "Was it because he left her to walk home alone?" he inquired, tenderly, willing to make atonement for his apparent neglect. But Carmen only averted her head, muttering as she passed out that "It was nothing—only a slight headache and fit of depression." Anxious to avoid making an unnecessary fuss about what he concluded was, after all, some girlish whim, he accepted her explanation, and hastened to join her at the dining-table.

The first evening spent by the young couple under their own roof passed quietly, not to say heavily. Carmen still labored under her feelings of depression, which all Vere's efforts failed to remove, and he missed the light-hearted sallies and evident enjoyment which had usually accompanied their *tête-à-tête* dinners at the Parisian restaurants. The contrast between those brilliantly illuminated and gorgeously decorated establishments and their small dark *salle-à-manger* was striking even to Vere; and although, for his own part, he preferred the quiet and peaceful *chez soi*, he could make allowance for Carmen's feelings, particularly as he judged she was tired with the journey and the excitement of the day. Thus he raised no objection when she expressed her intention of retiring early. After



kissing her and wishing her *bonne nuit et bon repos*, he sallied forth with his pipe for a moonlight stroll. Tempted by the beauty of the night, and occupied with busy thoughts, he wandered farther than he had any intention, and finally losing his way, arrived home hours after his small household had retired to rest.

As he bent tenderly over his wife's pillow he was filled with compunction on discovering, by unmistakable signs, that she had cried herself to sleep. Her bosom was still heaving with convulsive sobs, and his first impulse was to awaken her and kiss away her tears. Thinking, however, that a night's repose would do her more good than the explanation which would keep until the morrow, he did not disturb her slumber.

As soon as he awoke next morning he hastened to inform Carmen of the cause of his prolonged absence, and displayed so much genuine contrition for the anxiety he had unwittingly caused her that she felt unable to give expression to the tumultuous wrath which had possessed her overnight.

None the less the memory of that unhappy incident rankled in the girl's breast, and served as a rallying-point for future misunderstandings.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

"Give me that man  
That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him  
In my heart's core, aye, in my heart of hearts,  
As I do thee."—SHAKESPEARE.

M. DE MALSHERBES was a type of a class by no means uncommon among his countrymen, and not unknown in an anglicized form on this side of the Channel. Pride, poverty, and indolence had proved the destruction of a career which opened full of hope and promise.

An only child, doted on and spoiled by his widowed mother, the seductions of Paris and a life of self-indulgence had deadened and finally extinguished the spark of genius and that aspiration after "better things" innate in the well-cultured youth of alert intelligence and keen sympathies.

The happiest and the most miserable periods of his existence had been spent in the ancient château in which he now vegetated—a solitary recluse. Here he was born, here he passed his happy childhood—a childhood tinged with the poetry of its surroundings—and hither he had returned a ruined and disappointed man, his youthful ambition and bright anticipations dead, and buried beneath the memory of past follies and wasted opportunities.

Still he did not repent. He would not admit that he had only himself to blame, that his life had proved a failure. No; he cursed rather the fate which had left him heir to a great name, and with a fortune disproportionate to the wants of a young nobleman of fashion.



And if he recalled regretfully the days when, having gained his *baccalauréat*, family influence procured his appointment as attaché to the Ministère des Affaires Etrangères—when high hopes of advancement and distinction filled his breast, it was only to bemoan the evil fortune that would not allow a limited income to suffice for an extravagant expenditure, and that led ultimately to debt, disgrace, and dismissal from his official position.

Another ground for reproach that he held against the fickle goddess was the rupture of a match with a great heiress, daughter of a wealthy sugar-refiner, arranged toilsomely by his fond mother at no small sacrifice of her personal feelings, in the hope of redeeming her son's shattered fortunes. Mademoiselle Brunois was young, pretty, and amiable, and the large settlements which her father was prepared to make in exchange for Victor's title and social position would have enabled the young man to extricate himself from debt, and start in life anew with all the advantages and prestige of wealth. But this was before the final crash, and while the young vicomte was still in the heyday of his enjoyment of the pleasures and fascinations of *la vie Parisienne*. His credit was still good, or, at any rate, he thought it so, and there was still enough honorable pride left in him to make the idea of marrying solely for money—fashionable and of every-day occurrence as it was—appear mean and derogatory to his dignity as the descendant of a noble race. Unfortunately, the form in which he elected to evince his repugnance was by treating his intended and her family *de haut en bas*; and, to make matters worse, he persisted in paying public attentions to a fashionable beauty, notorious for her powers of devouring the fortunes of the *jeunesse dorée* whom she lured by her charms to their certain destruction.

Now, Monsieur Brunois was not more thin-skinned than are most of his compatriots in such matters; but he was of opinion that the indiscretions which society winks at in high-born bachelors should, if continued, be at least decently veiled when matrimonial projects were in view. And, further, he had no intention that his daughter's fortune should be squandered in supplying the insatiable wants of this divinity of the lower world for all the *chic* that a *liaison* with her was supposed to lend to those who could afford to bask in her costly smiles.

Accordingly, he took occasion to hint as much to the vicomte, but finding his advice coldly received and openly disregarded, he addressed his remonstrances yet more emphatically to the young man's mother, by whom the negotiations had been at first set on foot.

Mme. de Malsherbes was a pious lady of exemplary moral character, and, in the abstract, viewed the so-called gay life which her son was leading with horror and reprobation. But though she found it difficult to reconcile his behavior with her inmost feelings and religious beliefs, the fact remained that he was but following the example of his father, and, indeed, of all the well-born youths of his class. "I know it's wrong," she used to say to herself; "but I can-



not expect my son to act differently to those of his own set. I suppose *le bon Dieu* shuts his eyes to the follies of young men, or He never would permit Parisian society to remain as it is. Or, perhaps, it may be to give us poor mothers a chance of saving their souls by our prayers." So the good lady spent her days in praying to the Virgin to preserve her son from the wiles of her own sex, and never lost her faith in and hopes of him, although his selfish extravagance was fast dissipating not only his own resources, but her small fortune as well.

Thus, while acknowledging to herself the justice of the complaint lodged by Monsieur Brunois, she replied by taking up the cudgels in defence of her darling son, and caused no small astonishment to the worthy manufacturer—brought up in the more healthy atmosphere of middle-class and provincial life—by the naïveté of some of the arguments which she adduced in justification of his conduct. Nevertheless, she promised to exert all her influence to induce her son to break off the obnoxious intimacy, and adopt a course of life better becoming a man about to enter the married state.

Unfortunately, in trying to enforce her plea, Mme. de Malsherbes repeated the threat uttered by Monsieur Brunois, that the next appearance of the vicomte in public with the frail fair one would be the signal for the termination of the engagement. The mere fact of a threat being employed against him by a man whom he regarded as a being of an inferior class, one to whom a De Malsherbes was already displaying too much condescension in deigning to barter his patrician blood against a fortune gained in trade, sufficed to set the infatuated youth's pride up in arms.

"Does the sugar stick maker think I am going to be ordered about like one of his employés?" he asked, indignantly. "No, mother, I may break with Coralie because it suits me, and because you ask it, but certainly not at the command of Monsieur Brunois, to become the laughing-stock of all Paris!" And so, having promised to accompany his inamorata to the theatre that evening, he braved Monsieur Brunois' indignation, and appeared in all his empty glory in an *avant scene* at the *Folies Bergeres*.

That entertainment was the most ruinous of the many extravagances in which the young vicomte had indulged since he had taken to posing as a leader of *la mode*. It cost him his bride and a fortune of at least two million francs, and, to crown his mortifications, Mademoiselle Coralie was in an execrable humor, which she took no pains to conceal.

Monsieur Brunois, justly incensed at the reckless disregard of his wishes, wrote a formal note requesting a discontinuance of the vicomte's visits, and, the intelligence soon spreading, brought Victor's hitherto obliging creditors down upon him *en masse*.

Hopelessly involved, the young man was forced to give up his diplomatic appointment and quit Paris, after settling his debts at the sacrifice of all the available fortune that he and his long-suffering mother possessed.

In his first access of rage and despair, Victor seriously contem-



plated suicide, or, failing that, enlisting as a volunteer in the African army, where he hoped he might meet death in a more honorable and less repugnant form. However, his mother's entreaties, and the alarming state of her health engendered by a long period of anxiety and over-excitement, induced him to forego his wild projects.

Fortunately, the ancestral château still remained to them, being settled on Mme. de Malsherbes under her husband's will, and thither mother and son returned in their hour of trial. Heart-broken and fearful for her son's future, the old lady lingered on for a few years, never breathing a word of reproach against the author of their misery, although the sad contrast of their present poverty-stricken existence with their former comfort and comparative affluence was sapping her strength and hurrying her to her grave.

When she died, Victor, who had conceived an inordinate aversion to Paris and its ways, continued the style of life to which he had now grown accustomed. He had always fancied himself gifted with poetic instincts, and employed much of his leisure in writing verses which were never destined to see the light of day, as he could find no publishers sufficiently enterprising to print his works except at his own cost, and this was a luxury he could not afford. However, his literary pursuits, combined with those of the chase, supplied him with sufficient occupation and made life worth living, although devoid of the gayeties and pleasures which a few years before had been his only aim and object.

The advent of near neighbors, in the persons of Vere Danvers and his youthful bride, not unnaturally caused considerable interest in the mind of M. de Malsherbes. In years he was still a young man; but since his fiasco of ten years before, he had so completely withdrawn himself from society that he had grown to consider himself quite proof against feminine charms, and a confirmed bachelor. Having been officially acquainted with the father of the Demoiselles Delaforet, and owning besides the land on which their establishment stood, he had received an invitation to Carmen's wedding festivities. Moved by some sudden vagary, he went, and was much struck with the surpassing loveliness of the bride, and not a little flattered by the flutter of excitement caused by his appearance in the little bourgeois circle. Another source of gratification was the discovery that he had not lost the elegant mannerisms and the trick of polite conversation on which he had prided himself in the days when he was a frequenter of fashionable salons. It seemed like a new breath of life to associate once more with people younger and brighter than the crusty old steward and his wife, who for many years had been his sole personal attendants and companions; and he returned to his gloomy residence with the determination to break through his solitary habits and to cultivate the acquaintance of his new tenants.

Accordingly, a few days after their return from Paris, M. de Malsherbes, having donned his most fashionable—or least old-fashioned—garments, and after taking unusual pains over the arrangement of his hair and his necktie, sallied forth to pay a formal visit to the young couple. Although there was a short cut across the park



from the château to the châlet, he thought that he was not yet on sufficiently intimate terms to avail himself of *les petites entrées*, and took the long circuit round by the road.

Arrived at Beaurivage, the vicomte was assured of the presence of its mistress by the sweet tones which rang through the closed persiennes of the little salon. Carmen was singing her favorite "Adieu," and M. de Malsherbes thought he had never heard diviner melody. Indeed, since he had quitted Paris, music, like mirth and light-heartedness, had been to him a dead language. To hear it thus again, just when he had determined to make another grasp at happiness and sociability, seemed to him a good omen. To his poetic fancy, the adieu was addressed to his ten years of solitary existence, to the gloom and morbid depression which had prematurely aged him; and the fair singer was to be at once the prophetess and the instrument of his conversion. In the exaltation of the moment he forgot to observe the formalities due to the occasion, and entering the vestibule, tapped at the door of the salon, without pausing to have his visit announced. So eager was he to express his gratitude and delight, that he scarcely waited for Carmen's "*Entrez*," before he thrust open the door and stood before her.

"Thanks, a thousand thanks, dear madame; I have been in heaven!" he exclaimed, with tears in his eyes; then, remarking Carmen's look of surprise, he continued more composedly, "Pray, forgive me for my unwarrantable intrusion, but your sweet music conquered me—took me out of myself. Can you picture to yourself a solitary dweller in a sandy desert suddenly transported to a cool and shady flower-garden—a captive, unexpectedly restored to light, life, and friends? Because, if so, you will understand and pardon my emotion."

Carmen had always understood that M. de Malsherbes was rather eccentric, so, controlling her first surprise, she rose from the piano, and, murmuring a few words of welcome, begged her visitor to be seated.

"You think me strange and abrupt, no doubt; but I assure you, dear lady, that I entertain for you none but feelings of the deepest respect. I am a poet, and unhappy, and you have unlocked the door which barred my aspirations after happiness. Unconsciously, perhaps; but still, you have done it, and can I content myself with mere conventionalities? You are the first ray of light—the first glimpse of the beautiful, that has gladdened my eyes for these ten years. Some other time I will strive to explain myself more fully, to express my gratitude more fitly; now, I can only say *merci et pardon*," and the vicomte, bending over her little hand, reverently impressed a kiss upon it.

The evident genuineness of his emotion and the tender deference of his demeanor prevented Carmen from feeling any actual alarm at this unexpected outburst from a comparative stranger; still, she could not repress a slight sensation of nervousness.

"I am very sorry my husband is not at home," she observed, with more sincerity than such a remark generally implies. "Yesterday



was my reception day, and, not expecting any visitors, Vere has gone out sketching in the forest."

"I, too, regret his absence," replied the vicomte, regaining his self-command. "But, since we are such near neighbors, I hope I may be allowed to dispense with ceremony—as, for the matter of that, I have done to-day—and drop in to see him on some future occasion. My friends are not so numerous that I can afford to lose the chance of making new ones, and the sight of youth and beauty makes me feel young again."

"Indeed you must have felt lonely in that big place without friends," said Carmen, softening under the influence of his subtle flattery.

"Lonely! Ah, madame, lonely is not the word to express my wretchedness. But that is past and gone, if I am to be honored with your friendship; and I will not sadden your ears with a recital of my woes. Are these pictures your husband's? How charmingly he paints."

"Yes, but these are by no means his best. You did not see his great picture in the Salon last spring? It was very much praised, and justly so, I think."

"You have reason to be proud. What a glorious mistress is Art! Humble votary as I am, I owe it to her that life has been possible to me since my misfortunes."

The vicomte looked so interestingly handsome as he uttered these words in a soft under-tone, passing his hand the while over his brow with a gesture of subdued melancholy, that Carmen felt quite sorry for him. For years past his name had been familiar to her. The romantic history attaching to the poet recluse had been the subject of engrossing interest to several generations of *pensionnaires* at Mademoiselle Delaforet's school, and the thought that she alone of them all—indeed, of the entire world of Boisy-la-Reine—should be the chosen recipient of his confidences, filled her with secret gratification and pride. For a moment she hesitated whether to give expression to her sympathy, but fearing to display her ignorance of the ways of the *beau monde*, she simply said, "I can well believe it; Art appears to be all-absorbing, all-sufficient—at any rate, for men. My husband is so wrapped up in *his*, that I sometimes almost feel inclined to be jealous of it."

"But, surely, if it is a case of rivalry between Art and Love, the latter *must* prevail when *you* are its exponent?" exclaimed the vicomte, with a look of surprise which thinly veiled intense admiration.

As yet, the girl's heart was all her husband's. Experience, indeed, had taught her that the actual did not attain to the ideal, and she sometimes felt a secret longing for a more ardent and sympathetic devotion than Vere seemed capable of offering. Still, no thought of possible evil from allowing a stranger to burn incense on the altar which should be sacred to one alone, crossed her mind. Naturally ambitious, and with a newly awakened thirst for admiration strong upon her, she accepted the vicomte's outspoken homage as a welcome tribute to her fascinations.



“Ah! M. le Vicomte, you speak as a poet, and with a poet’s warmth of language, while my husband speaks and thinks through his brush, reserving for his canvas the expression of his deepest thoughts and tenderest feelings,” rejoined Carmen, after a pause—smiling and blushing with charming coquetry.

“With such a sweet inspiration and model always at his side, small wonder that his paintings teem with life and beauty; although I marvel that he has not rather chosen figures instead of landscapes as a subject for his pencil.”

“Well, you must come some other day when he is at home, and convert him to your views,” she replied, as a hint that their *tête-à-tête* had lasted long enough.

“With all my heart. What little I know of Monsieur Danvers makes me long to cultivate a closer acquaintanceship. I shall hope to persuade him to do me the honor of accepting such hospitality as my poor château is still able to dispense;” and M. de Malsherbes rose and bent gracefully over her hand preparatory to taking his leave.

Carmen flushed with pleasure as she bade him adieu. This was a genuine social success. To be invited to the residence of the proud and exclusive vicomte would at once elevate her in the eyes of Boisyla-Reine to an unassailable position and influence.

Just then the door was opened softly, and the servant entered the room.

“Ah, pardon! I was not aware madame had visitors,” exclaimed the woman, preparing to retire.

“Stay, Louise! Attend M. le Vicomte to the door,” said Carmen, gently withdrawing her hand from her visitor’s grasp and courtesying in response to his elaborate salutation.

Louise cast a quick glance of curiosity towards her mistress, and followed M. de Malsherbes out of the room.

“They are beginning well—these turtle-doves,” she muttered, as she stood in the doorway watching the retreating form of the distinguished visitor, and then returned to her work—a sinister smile playing around her lips.

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## CHAPTER IX.

“I have no other but a woman’s reason—  
I think him so because I think him so.”

SHAKESPEARE.

PRIOR to Vere’s rupture with his father, Psyche had been prime favorite at Danverfield. She was the only member of the family from whom the squire would brook even the semblance of contradiction, and, strange to say, he admired in her the independence of thought and speech which he stamped out so ruthlessly in his own children.



Nevertheless, his autocratic temper would not allow him to ignore such flagrant disregard of his express commands as she had evinced by her open championship of his rebellious son, and, to Psyche's no small regret, although she was too proud to own it, she had fallen deep into her uncle's bad graces.

Yet, notwithstanding his avowed displeasure, he cherished in his heart of hearts a secret admiration for the girl's pluck and steadfastness, and longed to find an excuse for a reconciliation.

"Let her say she is sorry for her disobedience, and promise not to repeat it," he wrote on several occasions to his brother, "and I am ready to overlook the past and forgive the little minx." But Psyche could be as firm as he was in what she considered to be a just cause, and neither persuasions nor threats could prevail upon her to abandon her correspondence with Vere, nor to admit that he deserved the harsh treatment he had received at his father's hands.

At last, after a lapse of years, her uncle's wrath having considerably cooled down in the mean time, he instructed his submissive wife to send Psyche an invitation free of all conditions. "The obstinate little puss has beaten me," he owned to himself, more than half inclined to be proud that she alone of all the family had dared to measure her will with his. Even in yielding, however, he sheltered his capitulation behind his wife's desire to see her niece once more.

Psyche was clever enough to read between the lines, and feeling sure that, without the squire's consent and approval, Mrs. Danvers would never have dared to hold out the olive-branch, rejoiced exceedingly over her victory as a good omen for Vere's future forgiveness.

The affection which the girl had always entertained for her favorite cousin had grown stronger and deeper in face of the opposition of her relations and their cowardly concurrence in his father's unnatural fiat of ostracism and banishment. She regarded Vere as a martyr to her uncle's invincible obstinacy. And since he had had the courage not only to assert his right to choose a career for himself, but had manfully fought his way unaided to a position full of promise, the sympathy and sense of outraged justice which had first brought her to his side had given place to a tenderer feeling, which was something more than mere cousinly regard.

Vere had become her hero, her beau-ideal of everything noble and good in man. Circumstances, indeed, had prevented that personal intercourse without which love—at any rate, in its earlier stages—is starved and pinched like a flower bereft of sunshine; but the seeds of a strong attachment were sown, and, though buried deep in her heart, lay ready to break forth and blossom on the slightest encouragement.

The first intimation of this state of her feelings was the dull, cold pang of disappointment, almost of despair, called forth by the intelligence of his engagement to Carmen Mendes. In vain she told herself that the union of her two dearest friends was a subject for rejoicing and congratulation, and one for which she herself was, to some extent, answerable. The sense of desolation and void that



wrung her heart when she thought of a future in which Vere would belong to another—torn out of her life like a page from a book, thereby rendering it incomplete and purposeless—belied the arguments by which she strove to convince herself that she was glad and happy.

Nevertheless, with that power of self-abnegation which is woman's noblest attribute, she conquered her rebellious feelings, and forced herself not only to write her felicitations on an event which she now knew was a death-blow to her own happiness, but resolved to redouble her efforts to reinstate Vere in his father's favor. What she suffered during the conflict no human soul ever knew. Throughout she was unremitting in her attentions to her fretful and invalid mother, and her friends attributed the pallor which displaced the roses of health on her cheeks and the disappearance of her wonted gayety to the arduous duties of her position as sick-nurse, which no persuasion could induce her to relinquish.

At length, to the relief of all, Mrs. Danvers regained in some measure her health, and Psyche, who, now that the crisis was past, felt the need of a change of air and scene, was enabled to avail herself of her aunt's invitation.

Danverfield was a long, low, straggling building, or rather accumulation of buildings. Originally a farm-house, it still retained its unpretentious appearance, although the addition of wings and bay-windows, and the conversion of a cart-track into a carriage-drive flanked by a fine avenue of chestnuts, had raised it from a simple homestead to an abode suitable for a gentleman of position and means.

The entrance-hall, which showed signs of having once been the kitchen and family dwelling-room, was spacious, but low. A large fire-place, with stone dogs and an enormous carved chimney-piece, stood at one end. The oak-panelled walls were hung with antlers, foxes' masks and brushes, hunting-crops, guns, fishing-rods, and all the paraphernalia of the chase. Long rafters, blackened by age and smoke, crossed the ceiling from side to side, and from that nearest the outer door depended curtains of dark red material, which lent an air of snugness to the apartment, whither on winter evenings the squire was accustomed to resort for his after-supper pipe.

Adjoining the hall was the business and justice room—another remnant of the old house—which was severely plain in its style of decoration and furniture. In it one seemed to breathe an atmosphere of stern, cold, uncompromising justice, untempered by mercy. The very chairs appeared to reflect the hard, unbending nature of the man who therein ruled supreme, and no delinquent could attend a summons thither without feeling that to enter was to "leave hope behind."

The corresponding apartment on the other side served as an ante-chamber to the drawing-room, which was lofty and well proportioned, and furnished with some pretensions to luxury and taste, and marked the transition in the family fortunes that had occurred when one of the present squire's ancestors had unexpectedly succeeded to a considerable legacy.

Notwithstanding their advance in the social scale, the old class in-



stinct and habits had clung to the succeeding generations of the Danvers family. Farmers they had been from time immemorial, and farmers they remained—with this difference, that their acres were now counted by hundreds instead of by tens, and that the land was their own, constantly added to with jealous eagerness by each inheritor of the estate.

The present squire, like his father before him, was old-fashioned and simple in his tastes. The only extravagance in which he indulged was in keeping a pack of harriers and a stable filled with the best horses that knowledge and money could procure. In fact, his stud was so well known that many a "thruster" from the shires journeyed down to Yorkshire and submitted to the comparatively tame sport to be had with the Danverfield Harriers for the chance of picking up something that would carry him well to the front at Rugby or Melton.

Psyche owed her position in her uncle's estimation in no small degree to the fact that she was a skilful and fearless horsewoman, whereas, to his great chagrin, none of his own daughters ever took kindly to the pig-skin. From her earliest girlhood a visit to Danverfield during the hunting season had been her greatest delight, and one that for a considerable number of years she had enjoyed more or less regularly.

The sacrifice of this pleasure, which she had been forced to make for the sake of her constancy to Vere's cause, had been by no means one of the lightest of her trials, and it was with delightful anticipations of its renewal that she added her riding apparel to her list of requisites for the present visit.

Although Danverfield was not more than twenty miles distant from Scarborough, it was eight miles from the nearest railway-station. According to arrangement, Psyche's brother Charlie, who since Vere's departure had acted as the squire's bailiff, drove over in a dog-cart to meet her.

"You'll find the old boy as crotchety as ever, or more so, if possible," said Charlie, in reply to one of her first and most anxious inquiries. "I never in my life came across such a Tartar. I declare I don't wonder that Vere cut it—I would myself, like a shot, if it wasn't for the gov'nor. The old brute works me like a galley-slave, and treats me like one too."

"Why don't you stand your ground and give it him back like a man?" asked Psyche, laughing at her brother's dolorous visage. "It's just because everybody cringes to him that he rides roughshod over them. I won't—you'll see."

"Oh, it's all very well for you. You're a girl, and a favorite; and then you're not dependent on the old curmudgeon as I am. Besides, he treats all alike—wife, daughters, and servants—and it's not easy to make a stand by one's self."

"Well, he will have to reckon with me now," cried the girl, with a determined smile; "and if he bullies my little brother in my presence I shall give him a piece of my mind, whether he likes it or not. By-the-bye, isn't Bessie staying there?"



"Yes; she and her husband and belongings arrived last week, but the squire cares no more for his son-in-law—all captain that he is—than he does for me or the Pope. I believe he'll bully 'the old gentleman' himself when he goes below, and if he doesn't make the place too hot to hold them both, I'm a Dutchman! It's even betting that the squire kicks 'old Nick' out, and 'rules the roast' in his stead."

"Come, Charlie, it's too bad to talk like that of poor uncle Hugh. He's like the other 'old gentleman,' not so black as he's painted. The fact is, he's been spoiled by always being treated like a little king, and never having anybody to contradict him."

"If you mean to come that game, it's hardly worth troubling to unpack your trunk—you'll be bound back home again by to-morrow," said Charlie, gloomily. "You don't know how savage he's grown since Vere left."

"Poor old man! that's a good sign. It shows he's ashamed of his unnatural behavior; and I mean to make him more ashamed still before I've done."

"Then all I can say is, that I shall try to get leave of absence for a few weeks; for if you begin talking about Vere you'll have the house down between you."

"Don't be afraid! I know the measure of my adversary," cried Psyche, laughing gayly. "Besides, remember, I am going in the proud position of a conqueror, with all the prestige of victory. But come, you haven't told me about the horses. What has become of my favorite Norah, and how have the Fire-king colts turned out?"

"Norah is still to the fore, and as fresh on her legs as ever, and the squire sold one of the colts to Lord Temple for two hundred guineas," replied her brother, who then proceeded to give a detailed account of the stud, which served to entertain Psyche until they reached their destination.

As the cart drew up in front of the house Mrs. Danvers appeared at the door with two or three maid-servants, while a youth, compound of groom and farm-laborer, ran to the horse's head.

"Welcome, a thousand times, my darling," cried the old lady, folding her niece in her arms. "I can't tell you how delighted I am to see you after all these years."

"And I you, dear aunt," replied Psyche, returning her embrace. "And how are uncle Hugh and Mary and all the rest?"

"All pretty well. Come in, my dear, your uncle is in his room; I dare say he'll come out when he knows you have arrived." So saying, Mrs. Danvers led Psyche into the hall and proceeded to divest her of her cloak and hat.

After waiting a little time and gazing nervously towards the door of the squire's sanctum in expectation of his appearance, the old lady shook her head sadly, and proceeded to conduct her niece to her bedroom, telling her that tea would be served in the dining-room in half an hour. "Don't trouble to dress, my dear, for your uncle doesn't like to be kept waiting, but come down-stairs as soon as you have made yourself comfortable. I do hope he'll be in a



good humor—you'll find him sadly changed. Now I'll send Sarah to unpack your things, and I will leave you to yourself for a little while;" and Mrs. Danvers trotted away to forward the preparations for the meal.

Having performed a hurried toilet, Psyche descended to the dining-room. Here she found the little party assembled, consisting of her aunt, her cousin Mary—the only unmarried daughter—Captain Compton and his wife, and her brother Charlie. As the clock struck six the door opened and Mr. Danvers entered the room.

"Tea not ready yet," he remarked, in a grumbling tone—"always behind time; I never knew such an unpunctual household." Then noticing the new arrival, he turned towards her and held out his hand: "How are you, my dear? You've been long enough making up your mind to come and see us."

Psyche rose, and pressing her lips against her uncle's withered cheek, replied, with a saucy smile, "It's not entirely *my* fault—is it, now, uncle? But never mind, here I am at last, and here I mean to stay till you are tired of me, or I am wanted at home."

Mrs. Danvers and her daughters looked on anxiously during this little defiant speech, expecting a wrathful rejoinder. However, the old man contented himself with thrusting the girl playfully back, calling her a "saucy young baggage," and then, disregarding of his other visitors, addressed himself to his tea and muffins, which, in the mean time, the servants had brought into the room.

Strange to say, all ill-mannered tyrant that he was, the squire's outward appearance was eminently prepossessing. A fine open brow crowned with a profusion of silvery white hair, bright blue eyes, and regular features, seemed to betoken a cultivated and benevolent disposition. But either Dame Nature had indulged in a puck-like spirit of perversity when she clothed this cross-grained, self-willed being with so godlike a form, or else the selfish and unchecked exercise of power had distorted gifts and qualities capable, when rightly used, of the greatest good into mere instruments of evil.

The only indication of the true temper of the man lay in a certain shiftiness in his eyes, somewhat similar to that observable in a vicious horse; and those who knew him well and had cause to dread his anger could generally presage the coming outbreak from the lightning glance, followed by a fixed mulish stare into vacancy, which means mischief in either quadruped or biped.

When in a good-humor, Mr. Danvers was as agreeable a companion as one would wish to have. Although not highly educated, nor deeply read, he possessed a fund of information about matters appertaining to his own vocation. And when he chose, he could pour forth a stream of racy and amusing anecdotes, full of quaint humor and displaying considerable powers of memory and observation. But, unfortunately, the occasions when he saw fit to exert himself to please others were few and far between, and of late years his evil genius preponderated. The happiest days of his life were those passed in the saddle and occupied in following his hounds; but



even his hunting friends remarked that he displayed less hearty enjoyment in his favorite sport, and had become more prone to find fault with either hounds or field on the slightest provocation.

Mixing little with other men, except in his capacity of master, the pride and self-will which had always been his besetting sins became ingrained in his nature, and the habits of command, which he exercised in field and kennel, were practised with undiminished rigor at his own fireside.

What little restraining influence his wife—a gentle, tender-hearted lady—ever possessed, had lapsed through disuse and the growth of years, which tended to strengthen her habits of unquestioning submission and his autocratic self-assertion. Their children had been thoroughly indoctrinated with the belief that their father's will was law; and even now, all grown-up men and women as they were, with the solitary exception of Vere, none ventured to question his authority.

Formerly, provided always that he was never thwarted nor contradicted, the squire was accustomed to display a certain rough affection towards his family and dependents, which compensated for a good deal of ill-usage and bad temper. His rare marks of favor were treasured up as proofs of the goodness of his heart; for, like dogs, human beings have a natural inclination to worship a masterful master, and to think more of an occasional caress from the hand that beats them than of all the tenderness lavished by those who seek to rule by love alone.

But of late years, age and growing infirmities, and—although he would not admit it himself—a secret pining after the son he had so sternly driven from his home, had blotted out even these few bright spots, leaving his character an unhappy blending of dull gloominess and morose savagery. The very obedience and submission to which he had been at so much trouble to train his surroundings had become irksome to him. He dreaded opposition with a morbid nervousness; and yet, with the strange perversity of a disordered mind, he positively hated his wife and family for having allowed him to exile his favorite son, and for obeying his behests in never interceding on Vere's behalf, nor daring even to mention his name.

Thus the advent of Psyche—the outspoken and courageous champion of her disgraced cousin—was almost as much a matter of congratulation to the wrong-headed and unhappy old man as to the sorrowing mother, who, although compelled to silence, had never ceased to yearn after her absent boy.

The evening meal passed pleasantly enough in general conversation, and without any of the outbursts of ill-temper to which all were now accustomed on the part of the squire, even in the presence of visitors. Captain Compton, who had spent the day in shooting over the farm, gave an amusing account of his performances, and finding the old gentleman in such an unwonted good-humor, ventured to confess to having shot a hen-pheasant, which he had flushed in the stubbles, in mistake for a partridge. Mr. Danvers, as a rule, treated his son-in-law quite as one of the family, that is, he



bullied him like the rest, and mercilessly ridiculed the mistakes into which the captain, although a keen sportsman, was continually led, owing to his defective vision. On this occasion, however, he contented himself with remarking, with a grim smile,

"I'm ashamed of you, Compton, a man wearing her Majesty's uniform, to go breaking the law like any common poacher—shooting pheasants in September. We shall have you potting hares in their forms next, or adding a fox or two to your bag. You're quite competent for that after your practice on the dogs."

This jocose reference to a former unhappy exploit raised a general laugh, under cover of which the ladies withdrew to the drawing-room.

Mary Danvers, knowing that her mother was burning to have a confidential chat with Psyche, accompanied her sister up-stairs on a visit to the children. "I am so glad you are come, dear," she said to Psyche as she passed out. "Father hasn't been so cheerful for a long time."

"I hope you won't let her go while I and Horace are here, if she can only keep him in a good-humor," joined in Bessie, following her sister. "Horace swears he'll never come again to be badgered as he has been during the past week."

As soon as they were alone, Mrs. Danvers turned to her niece.

"Well, dearest, what news of my poor boy?"

"He was very well when I last heard, and happy in his new condition," replied Psyche, forcing a smile, though the words called up bitter memories.

"Is he *quite* happy? Is *she* all that he could wish? I can't quite understand dear, dreamy old Vere selecting a fiery Spaniard for his wife."

"She selected him—or, rather, it was a case of mutual attraction. Carmen is very beautiful and bewitching," said Psyche, smothering a sigh.

"Well, you know her, and I don't; but I confess I would rather he had married an Englishwoman. Wouldn't you, dear, yourself?"

"He must be the best judge in a matter which so entirely concerns his own happiness. Does Uncle Hugh know? Have you told him?"

"No, dear; to tell the truth, I didn't dare. You know he forbade me ever to speak to him of Vere again; and, really, he has been so strange and excitable of late, that I feared for the consequences of so sudden and startling a disclosure."

"But surely he must be told sooner or later?"

"Well, yes, I suppose so. But do you know, my dear, I'm sadly afraid that, with your uncle's prejudice against foreigners, the intelligence might render a reconciliation almost impossible. And I sometimes hope that he is beginning to relent."

"Indeed, I am glad to hear it," cried Psyche, joyfully, "for the sake of all."

"I knew you would be, you dear, brave girl!" said the old lady, with tears in her eyes. "You have been Vere's truest friend. You



put his mother to shame. But ah! if you could know what I have suffered, and how I long to clasp the dear boy once again in my arms, to assure him that my duty to his father has alone prevented me from flying to his side long ago."

"He knows, dear, that it was no fault of yours," said Psyche, softly caressing the old lady's withered cheek. "Don't fret yourself. One day all will come right, and you will have him home again."

"Please God it may happen before I die. It's all I have to live for now," replied Mrs. Danvers, mournfully.

"It will happen before long, dear aunt, I promise you. Uncle Hugh can't resist me when my mind is made up, and I will give him no peace till he relents."

Further confidences were interrupted by the entrance of Captain Compton and Charlie.

"The squire's a new man since your arrival," cried the latter, embracing his sister. "He talks of taking the hounds out to-morrow morning early, and wishes to know if you will ride Norah or Peacock."

"Oh, how delightful!" exclaimed the girl, her eyes lighting with pleasure. "I think I must give my old friend Norah the preference."

"You haven't seen Peacock; he's a beauty. Eyes like a gazelle, lovely little ears, and such shoulders, and such quarters. Jumps like a deer, too!" said Charlie, enthusiastically.

"He's rather eccentric in his movements, though," remarked the captain, dryly. "Not unlike an exaggerated flea. I took him out the other day, and he promptly displayed his jumping powers by bucking me over his head."

"He wouldn't be so ungallant to a lady, I am sure," laughed Psyche. "Anyway, I'll put him to the test one of these days if I get the chance."

"Pray don't run any risk, my dear," said Mrs. Danvers, anxiously. "I don't like these wild horses, and your uncle is so reckless. He thinks because he can master them everybody else can."

"I think so too. Patience and tact generally win in the long-run, and I flatter myself I have a little of both," replied the girl, gayly. "Besides, it won't do to show the white feather. If I cannot conquer the slave, I can never hope to prevail against the master."

"What's that you're talking about, Miss Psyche? You'll find the squire a good handful if you mean to join issue with him. I shouldn't like to warrant him quiet either to ride or drive," said Captain Compton.

"I mean to try, all the same, as soon as I am sure of my seat. A determined female takes a lot to kick her off—and uncle knows me of old."

"You're right there. Since I bent my back to the side-saddle, I daren't call my soul my own. Oh, here's Bessie; sha'n't I catch it!" cried the captain in mock terror, as his wife entered the room.

"You deserve to, no doubt; but I'll forgive you this time, not



knowing what offence you have committed," said Mrs. Compton. "But I make this the condition, that you escort Psyche and me for a stroll in the park before supper. You'll come, won't you, Psyche? It's too fine to spend the whole evening in-dcours."

"I shall be delighted."

"And so shall I," said the gallant captain. Then, as he followed the ladies out of the room, he remarked to Psyche, in a pathetic voice, "You see the truth of my assertion. She never trusts me out of her sight if she can help it. 'O solitude, where are thy charms?'"

"You can walk by yourself if you like, Captain Compton," said Psyche, demurely. "Bessie and I have plenty to talk about."

"Of course you side with your own sex, and wilfully misunderstand me. By solitude I meant permission to accompany you alone. But there, it's no use crying after the moon. I've bartered away my liberty, and must support my chains as best I may," he replied, laughingly, drawing his wife's arm through his own, and leading the way into the garden.

## CHAPTER X.

"Hi! Yoicks! Tally-ho! And away we go,  
Across the fields we fly;  
Into hedge and ditch we sometimes pitch,  
But we don't care there to lie."—*Hunting Song.*

THE next morning, a short hour after sunrise, the Danverfield pack was assembled in a paddock adjoining the kennels. Fifteen couple of wiry, intelligent-looking hounds, under the charge of old Philip the whip, anxiously awaited the arrival of their master and the commencement of the sport which they knew instinctively was in store for them. Nor had they long to wait. A clattering of hoofs was heard on the drive, and the squire, accompanied by Psyche, Captain Compton, and Charlie, entered the field.

"Ware horse; quiet, Bachelor. Stop your noisy yelping," shouted the master, forcing his horse through the surging mass that came clustering round him with joyful signs of recognition. "There, Miss Psyche, isn't that a sight to make your heart glad? There's not a better pack in the country."

"They are beauties!" cried the girl with enthusiasm. "Isn't that old Tomboy? I believe he knows me after all these years."

"Quite right, my girl; I'm glad you haven't lost your eye for hounds. Do you remember that rare old bitch, Diana? We've had several litters from her. That's one of her puppies—that spry-looking hound with a black patch on his back. Here, Philip, bring Acteon for Miss Danvers to see."

"Good-morning, Philip. How are you? Quite well? You see,



"I'm coming out with you again," said Psyche, as the old man approached.

"Right glad to see yer, miss; seems like old times when you and Master Vere—" Terrified at the slip of which he had been guilty, in the excitement of the meeting, the old man stopped short, expecting a torrent of abuse from his master as the very lightest punishment for his forgetfulness. But either the squire did not hear, or, hearing, did not heed the infraction of his stern ordinance. At any rate, he merely remarked in a gruff tone, as he tightened his girths, "Stop your chattering, you old fool, and get the gate open. We sha'n't have a yard of scent by the time we get to work if we don't make a start. We'll draw the Moor Farm first."

Psyche noted this occurrence as of good omen for the object she had at heart. It was something gained to know that her uncle could now hear his absent son's name mentioned without flying into a rage, and she determined to follow up her advantage at the first opportunity.

"Do you expect many at the meet this morning, uncle?" she asked, as they jogged along side by side, following Philip and the hounds down a grass lane towards the outlying farm, where they were going to commence operations.

"No; I doubt it. I only settled to take the hounds out late last night, so I couldn't let many of 'em know. I sent word to old Jeykes, and he'll probably pass it on to two or three. But you see, my dear, the harvest isn't quite all up, so I haven't begun regular hunting yet."

"I believe you had them out on purpose for me? It's very kind of you, uncle, dear."

"Perhaps I did, and perhaps I didn't. Don't you worry your little head about 'reasons why,' but just enjoy yourself if you can."

"If I can? I should like to know how I can help it. A morning's sport in view; a good horse under me, and—you won't be angry, dear—a feeling that my dear uncle Hugh has got over his fit of unjust anger, and means to be a nice, kind uncle and—*father*—again!" she replied, looking boldly up at him with a meaning smile.

"Confound you women; you never can let well alone," growled the squire. "We've come out for hunting, and not for preaching."

"I didn't mean to preach, and if it seemed like it, I'm sorry. But if you call leaving things as they are 'leaving well alone,' I'd better tell you at once that I don't agree with you, and what's more, I don't mean to," replied Psyche, with spirit. This was a bold stroke, but the girl felt that, if she once allowed her uncle's tyrannical nature to assert itself over her, her influence would be lost. She knew her adversary thoroughly, and gauging with tolerable accuracy the advantages of her position, determined to carry the assault boldly into the heart of the enemy's country before he had time to decide on his line of defence.

"You know, uncle, I came here because you asked me," she continued, assuming an injured tone, without waiting for his reply. "And you knew when you invited me that I had not altered my



opinions, and am not given to conceal them, so that you have nobody to blame but yourself."

"Bless the girl! Who said anybody was to blame? I only asked you not to talk about—those things when we've come out for a day's pleasuring," said the old man, half apologetically.

"Fond as I am of hunting, it would give me more pleasure to hear you say one kind word of Vere than if you offered to take me out every day of my life. Oh, Uncle Hugh, *do* forget this miserable quarrel, and let us all be happy again? You are breaking your wife's heart and your own, and all for the sake of a little paltry pride and temper!" As Psyche spoke in an earnest tone of mingled entreaty and command, she fixed her tearful eyes full on her uncle's face. It was a critical moment. He was within an ace of breaking out into one of his furious passions; but something in her look restrained him. The consciousness that she spoke the truth; the remembrance of her constancy and devotion to a cause that was not in any sense her own—the very boldness with which she affronted his wrath—exercised a softening influence, and when, after a few moments' silence, he spoke, his voice was low and almost tender.

"There, child, you're a good girl, and mean well. We'll talk about it one of these days, but not now; I don't feel up to it;" and the old man pushed his horse forward, scattering the hounds right and left, to join the whip at the head of the pack.

Uttering a mental "Io triumpho!" Psyche reined her mare and waited for her brother and the captain, who had dropped somewhat behind, to join her. Relieved of the anxiety of the impending conflict (for when she rose that morning she had fully made up her mind not to let the day pass without an effort on Vere's behalf), Psyche was able to look around and enter into the full enjoyment of the situation and scene.

If Vere could only be beside her now! If she could only share her feelings of happiness with him, and read in his eyes the gratitude to which she felt she was entitled, and which his generous nature would be the first to acknowledge! As she mused thus her cheeks flushed with delight, and her heart beat faster. But, like most keen mental ecstasies, the mere act of reducing them into a tangible form caused their instant dissolution. The thought of Vere's bodily presence recalled his changed condition. Grateful he might be, but nothing more. For a moment, the morning mist seemed to gather in her eyes, blotting out the bright sunshine and damping the happiness which had pervaded her whole being. But only for a moment. The strength of her nature soon reasserted itself, and the longings, half reproachful, half jealous, were torn out and thrust aside as unworthy of true friendship, and she turned to greet her advancing companions with a pleasant smile and unruffled composure.

"I declare you're a second Una and the lion," exclaimed Captain Compton. "What is the secret of the subtle sorcery you exercise over your uncle? The family ought to combine to buy it of you—for use when you are gone."



"I suppose it is that I am not afraid of him," laughed the girl. "Then, you know, we are old friends; Uncle Hugh was always very fond of me."

"I don't wonder at that. But he's fond of his wife and family, or ought to be, and yet he treats them like slaves."

"Well, you see, it's not quite the same thing. He hasn't any actual authority over me."

"Nor has he over me, but he treats me as though he had; and he's such a masterful old tyrant that I don't much fancy raising the question."

"Don't you remember, on one or two occasions, when you tried to assert your dignity, how the old man was down upon you like a hammer on a nail?" joined in Charlie, with a mischievous chuckle.

"When sorrow sleepeth, wake it not!" Charlie, my boy," retorted the captain, good-humoredly. "I fancy we have both been occasionally tarred with the same brush, only you being constantly on the spot come in for more frequent applications."

"Oh, I make no secret of my unhappy condition. Talk of the horrors of slavery, and the cruelties formerly practised by masters on their apprentices! They're child's play compared with what I have to put up with when the old boy is in a bad humor—as he generally is," cried the youth, pathetically.

"What a pity it seems that such a clever and nice man as Uncle Hugh naturally is, should have been allowed to degenerate into a cross-grained old tyrant," said Psyche, "and all for the want of a little judicious management."

"It's the old story of 'belling the cat.' Nobody fancied the job, and small blame to them," replied the captain, stroking his mustache. "I'd rather face a charge of cavalry than your uncle when he's roused."

"Aunt Mary might have done it if she had begun soon enough; I would in her place. He wasn't always like this, and though a woman owes obedience to her husband, she ought not to give up all attempts at guiding and controlling him."

"Not many wives do; it's generally the other way."

"Now, Captain Compton, you know that *you* have no cause to complain. I am sure Bessie is a model of docility."

"And so am I. It's the baby who tyrannizes over *our* establishment."

"You must take care that he doesn't grow up like his grandfather; it will be your own fault if he does," said the girl, merrily.

"Oh, there's not much fear of that. The next new arrival will effectually put his nose out of joint; such is the inconstancy of mothers. And if that fails, why I shall send him to his cousin Psyche, the renowned man-tamer," laughed the captain. "I declare, if I were young and single, I'd feign a violent disposition for the chance of being 'broke' by you."

During this conversation the little cavalcade had been jogging steadily along the winding lane, which, mounting gradually, led to-



wards the moorland country. Here, at the extreme limit of the Danverfield estate, was the place appointed for the meet.

The hounds were halted in a field adjoining the farm-house, and, as they drew up to them, Psyche perceived half a dozen horsemen at the rendezvous, among whom she recognized old Jeykes—who farmed a property adjoining her uncle's—and one or two other regular pursuers of the same class.

After the usual interchange of civilities the squire moved on with his hounds and threw off in a large, old fallow, which, lying high and dry and sheltered from the bleak north by a range of hills, was a favorite resort of hares. At the word of command, forward dashed the little pack, spreading out as they advanced among the tufts and knolls of long feathery grass in eager search for their close-lying quarry. Presently a hound opened. Farmer Jeykes cocked his ear and listened a moment. "That's old Tomboy, for a sovereign, and he's never at fault," he remarked to Psyche, with a grim smile. "You come along o' me, miss. She's sure to cross the brook at the bottom, and I'll show you where you can get over without jumping."

Tomboy spoke again, this time with more assurance; the rest of the pack ran in, and, picking up the line, away they streamed in full cry down the hill. "For'ard on! For'ard away!" shouted the squire, blowing his horn as he galloped after the hounds, followed by Philip, Charlie, and all those who meant facing the brook.

Old Jeykes wheeled off at right angles, beckoning to Psyche as he went. But she, laughingly, shook her head and followed the others. "I'd rather keep with the hounds," she cried, "and Norah's very good at water."

Onward swept the pack, led by old Tomboy, at a pace that made some of the youngsters tail off. Two or three fences had to be negotiated before they reached the valley, and then a line of pollarded willows and a gleam and a splash of water as the hounds scrambled in and out on the opposite bank, betokened a more formidable obstacle.

Charlie, on Peacock, was the first to reach it and clear it in fine style, with several feet to spare. Racing him, neck and neck, rode Captain Compton; but, owing to his short sight, he had not picked a good place, and, though he got over, his horse dropped his hind-legs in, and nothing but the pace saved him from a nasty fall. The squire and Philip, who knew every inch of the country, jumped it a little to the left, where the narrowing banks reduced the width, and Psyche followed their lead. Then a quick fifteen minutes over the grass meadows and the hounds threw up beside a hairy ditch. During the check, Psyche, after caressing her favorite's reeking neck, looked round, and found that the small array of pursuers was reduced by two—old Jeykes, who had not recovered the ground he had lost by his 'skirting,' and one of the young farmers, who had come to grief at the brook.

"What do you think of Peacock?" asked Charlie, drawing up to her side. "Did you see him take the brook?"



"I think he's a beauty, and nearly as vain as his rider," Psyche replied, laughingly.

"That's right, Miss Psyche. He wants taking down a peg," said Captain Compton, fanning his face with his hat. "By Jove, how hot it is!"

"I say, old chap, talk of taking me down, I thought you'd want taking up out of the brook. Perhaps you rode for a fall, thinking it would cool you," replied Charlie, between whom and the captain a certain friendly rivalry existed.

"Listen! They've hit it off again." And, sure enough, young Acteon, who inherited his mother's keen nose, was giving tongue in a jubilant treble. Tomboy and the rest of the older hounds looked up distrustingly, and seemed to treat the puppy's announcement with the disdain which is generally accorded to a tyro in most professions by his seniors. But the squire, being unprejudiced in this case, as an impartial observer, thought differently, and lifting his hounds on to the line indicated by the youngster, was rewarded for his confidence in youthful talent by a glad burst of music and another eager rush of the busy pack. Puss had skirted the ditch for a short distance and then doubled back in a wide loop towards her starting-point. However, before she reached the brook she was headed by old Jeykes, and, turning once more towards the open country with the hounds close on her scent, was bowled over in the open after a good thirty-five minutes from find to finish.

During the celebration of her funeral obsequies the field was augmented by several new arrivals from the neighborhood, who, hearing that the hounds were out, had hastily "booted and saddled," and sallied forth to join in the sport. Among these was a young officer of Captain Compton's regiment, who was staying with some friends not far from Danverfield. Lieutenant Holdsworth was a good-looking young fellow of six or seven-and-twenty. The spic and spanness of his attire, from his carefully waxed mustache to his lustrous Newmarket boots, betokened that he was not unaware of his personal attractions; and, as he rode leisurely up to greet his companion-in-arms, Psyche mentally branded him as a fop—a class which she held in the supremest contempt. She was therefore not best pleased when, after duly presenting his friend to the master, Compton, in evident compliance with the young man's request, introduced him to her. However, after a little conversation, she saw fit to modify her adverse opinion. There was a genial ring about young Holdsworth's voice, and an easy courtesy in his manner, which proved that, however much he valued himself, he was not without the power of appreciating others.

"I hope we shall have another run, don't you, Miss Danvers? It made my blood boil to see you galloping hard below as we came over the hill; and, unless my eyes deceived me, you were leading the field during the latter part of the run."

"One oughtn't to lag far behind on a horse like this," replied Psyche, glancing proudly down on her favorite.

"Perhaps not. But, after all, it's the rider who makes the horse;



and ladies, when they go at all, generally go well. Don't you think so?"

"That's hardly a fair question. If I say yes, you'll probably set me down as vain and self-satisfied, and if I reply in the negative, you'll think I'm fishing for a compliment."

"No such thing, I assure you. I meant what I said. Although I am a great admirer of the sex, I don't go in for paying compliments unless they are deserved."

"That's very kind of you," said the girl, with a saucy smile.

"How kind? It's the honest truth. I wasn't joking," he rejoined, slightly piqued by her manner.

"Surely you must know? First of all, as one of the 'lords of creation,' to admire us at all; and, secondly, to spare us that 'censure in disguise' of which the copy-books tell us."

"What a queer girl; and deuced sharp, too, for a country miss!" mused the young officer, who was accustomed to be petted and made much of by the ladies of his acquaintance. Then turning to his companion, "Do you go in for woman's rights and the equality of the sexes, Miss Danvers?"

"Do I look like it?"

"No, you don't, certainly," he replied, taking the opportunity for a good look at the pretty face and graceful figure of his companion.

"Then why do you ask?" said Psyche, determined not to give way to this spoiled darling.

"Well, don't you know, I judged from your way of speaking that you—sort of look down upon us men. You know what I mean."

"You give me credit for an immense amount of perspicacity," laughed Psyche, secretly delighted at his confusion. "And even if I did mean what you mean, I should hardly venture to express my opinions before so doughty a champion of the other side."

"Now, you know you're chaffing me."

"How can you think so! But while we're chattering here the hounds are drawing ahead, and if they find and go away, we shall be out of it." So saying, she gathered up her reins, and cantered off after the retreating pack.

"Not much more out of it than I am now," thought the young man, as he prepared to follow. "That girl's a regular puzzle; but, all the same, she's not bad fun!"

Another hare was found, and afforded them a good gallop, which, however, had a bloodless termination. As the morning advanced the sun's increasing power favored Miss Puss's dodges, and she managed to run out of scent.

During the burst, which was sharp, and over a very stiff line of country, young Holdsworth kept Miss Psyche pretty well in view. At first he did his utmost to cut her down, hoping to witch her with a display of noble horsemanship. But the girl, too, was on her mettle, and determined to show the self-complacent gallant that she could ride as well as talk. Well mounted as he was, her lighter weight told in her favor, and he had to content himself with keeping in close attendance on her, so that the distant back-view of his manly



person, with which he had hoped to spite her, was reserved for old Jeykes and others of the "slow and sure" contingent.

The lieutenant's homeward road lay past Danverfield; and when the master blew the hounds off, shortly before noon, the young man jogged along with them, and took the opportunity of renewing his conversation with his new "puzzle."

Arrived at the kennels, the squire, who was pleased with his morning's sport, and felt unusually well-disposed towards his surroundings, beckoned to his niece.

"You can ask your young spark to stop and take a bit of dinner with us if you like, my girl—if he's not too big a swell to eat in the middle of the day."

"You had better ask him yourself if you want him, uncle; the invitation wouldn't come well from me," replied Psyche, smiling at her uncle's ignorance of the proprieties.

"The devil it wouldn't! If he'd rather stay for an old man's asking than a pretty girl's, he's even a bigger fool than he looks," growled the squire, who always felt a kind of ferocious bashfulness in the presence of strangers.

"Here, Compton, ask your friend, lieutenant what's his name, to stay and dine; perhaps he'll liven you up a bit; at any rate, he'll do to amuse the women-folk. We can take his nag in for him, and he needn't trouble about changing. I shall sit down as I am; and by gad! he looks as though he was got up already for having his portrait painted!"

This invitation, transmitted in a more complimentary form, was gladly accepted by young Holdsworth. Strange to say, notwithstanding the somewhat cavalier treatment he had received at Psyche's hands, or, more correctly speaking, from her tongue, he was keenly desirous of becoming more intimately acquainted with the squire's charming niece.

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## CHAPTER XI.

"Since first I saw your face I resolved  
To honor and renown you;  
If now I be disdained, I wish  
My heart had never known you."—*Madrigal.*

"MAY I come in, uncle?" asked Psyche, opening the door of the squire's business-room, and taking the permission for granted.

The old gentleman was seated at his table, with a mass of books and papers before him. Notwithstanding his advanced age, he persisted in keeping the entire financial management of the estate in his own hands, even to paying his laborers' wages himself. Although he could be liberal, and even generous in large affairs and on special occasions, he was careful to niggardliness in the smaller items of every-day expenditure. Not a fraction of a penny beyond what was justly due could any of his employés hope for or obtain; and



yet, in cases of genuine distress or illness, assistance was always ungrudgingly afforded. It was characteristic of the man to haggle over a sixpence in a bargain, and yet bestow fifty or a hundred pounds on a deserving charity without thinking twice about it.

As his niece entered the room Mr. Danvers looked up from his work, surprised. For any one to appear in his sanctum unbidden was an event almost unprecedented. Yet when he saw who it was, he relaxed the frown with which he was prepared to greet the intruder.

"What a spirit the girl has," he thought, with an inward chuckle of enjoyment at the unconcerned manner in which she seated herself and calmly awaited his pleasure.

"Well, miss, and what the deuce do you mean by walking into my private room, interrupting my business like this?" he asked, in a tone of assumed anger.

"How else would you have me come, dear? I couldn't fly or crawl. I wanted to talk to you alone, and it's a good opportunity, as the others are all out shooting or driving; but, if you're busy, I'll come back again presently," replied Psyche, moving towards the door.

"Stay; don't be in such a confounded hurry. What do you want to talk about?"

"Can't you guess? I want to renew our conversation of yesterday where we left off."

"I thought I declined to discuss the subject."

"Perhaps you did, but you didn't mean it, I'm sure. You only said 'for the present'—don't you remember? It's no use frowning, dear; you've got to promise to be friends with Vere again, or else to be enemies with me; and in that case it wasn't worth the trouble of bringing me here. Uncle, dear, don't think I'm not in earnest. It would break my heart to part with you in anger again after having my hopes raised—if you only knew how Vere longs for a reconciliation!"

"Why doesn't he say so, then?" asked the old man, more affected by the girl's earnest appeal than he chose to show.

"How can he, dear, when you drove him away like a dog? It would be cowardly for him to come craving for pardon when he has committed no offence."

"No offence? And pray what do you call his open disregard of my wishes?"

"It's no worse than mine, and yet you forgave *me*—and I'm not your daughter."

"I wish you were," said the squire, stroking her hair as she knelt at his feet; "you're the best girl I ever knew—for all your sauciness."

"Then you *do* forgive him? You'll let me write and tell him so? Oh, Uncle Hugh, you dear old darling, I'm so glad!" and the girl flung herself into his arms, weeping for very joy.

Mr. Danvers's face was a study during this episode. A fierce struggle was evidently raging within him between the affection he bore his niece and the absent one whose cause she championed—and



his ingrained obstinacy and pride. Surprise, hesitancy, impatience, turn by turn, gained the upperhand, to be succeeded and overcome by shame-faced tenderness and a rekindling of better feelings.

Taking her head between his wrinkled hands, he gently raised it to a level with his own. "I suppose you must have your own way," he said, in a voice husky with emotion. "I forgive him; but on one condition."

"Name it. I agree on his behalf beforehand," cried Psyche, looking up with sparkling eyes.

"Gently! gently! You women always rush your fences. Now, tell me honestly, and without prevarication, Why have you stuck up for this graceless boy through thick and thin, when even his own mother and sisters forsook him?"

The girl flushed crimson under her uncle's searching glance. "Because I love him; because he's a dear, good, noble fellow; because—but why do you ask? Isn't it natural that I should love my cousin—my old friend and playmate?"

The squire hesitated a moment; then, in a tone of unwonted tenderness, "Forgive me, my dear, if I'm wrong. Cousinly affection and friendly regard are all very well in their way; but are you quite sure that is all? They don't seem to me to account for your behavior."

"What more do you want, you arch inquisitor?" asked Psyche, burying her face in his shoulder to hide her confusion at this unexpected thrust. "When was a woman ever able to explain her motives? You can call it obstinacy if you like. I'm as obstinate as a donkey; more so even than you."

"That won't do, Miss Pert. You're not carrying out your compact. Look here, my girl! let us understand one another clearly. There's nothing in this world would please me better than to have you for my daughter. I've often thought about it, but didn't believe that young scrapegrace worthy of you; but if he's good enough for *you*, I suppose you'll say that's not my affair. You shall be the boy's peace-offering; Vere shall marry you, and, as in the story-books, we'll live happily together ever afterwards."

"Oh, Uncle Hugh, *don't!*" she cried, in a voice in which she vainly strove to smother the pain and regret. "He doesn't love me—like that."

"By gad! then he *shall*, or he shall never darken my doors again! Not love you? Pooh! the ungrateful dog," exclaimed Mr. Danvers, waxing furious at the idea of opposition to his scheme. "Listen, child! My mind is made up. He comes back to be your husband or not at all."

"But, if I won't have him?"

"Nonsense! I know you better than you know yourself. You love the boy. Don't talk to me of cousinly love and friendship. Fudge and fiddle-sticks! Do you think I don't know the real thing when I see it?"

Psyche was growing desperate. To have this impossible happiness dangled before her eyes; to feel that the success of all her pain-



ful efforts depended on her power of giving the lie to an assertion to which every fibre of her heart throbbed assent, was almost more than she could bear. With a violent effort, she summoned courage to reply firmly,

"You are mistaken, dear. Vere can never be more to me than he is—than—my favorite cousin. And now," she continued, with an assumption of playfulness, "I'll run away and leave you to your work. We can talk it over again another time. Meanwhile I shall write off at once to tell him the good news."

"As you like; but I don't half believe you," growled the old man, in a disappointed tone, as she kissed him tenderly and slipped out of the room.

In the solitude of her own apartment Psyche mused with mingled feelings over her late encounter. Victory remained with her thus far, but she feared that the news of Vere's marriage might undo all that she had striven so hard to attain. And yet, as she herself had said, sooner or later it must be broken to Mr. Danvers. That upon her would ultimately devolve the painful task she felt no manner of doubt, and was inclined to reproach herself for not having taken advantage of her uncle's softened mood to make the avowal then.

On the other hand, she sought consolation in the reflection that a reconciliation once effected, the old man might view his son's position in a more friendly light than if it were thrust upon him while he was still wavering between outraged dignity and parental affection. In the excitement of the discussion, her uncle had omitted to ask, and she to volunteer, any information as to Vere's present habitation and mode of life. "I suppose that will come later," she thought; "and then it will be time enough to tell him about Carmen. The main point was to get him to promise to be friends again, and I ought to be thankful that I have been successful so far."

Thankful, no doubt she was, for Vere's sake; but for herself she felt his return would be a reopening of her secret sorrow, a period of trial for her self-command and fortitude. Absent, she could think of him impersonally as the man to whom her whole heart was given; she could even satisfy her secret devotion by working on his behalf, by writing to him and receiving his confidences in return. There was no fear in such intercourse as theirs had been during the past few years of her betraying the real nature of the friendship which she professed. Her love was strong, tender, passionless—partaking of the adoration of a devotee for the god at whose shrine she worships, rather than of the warmer and more human affection of woman for man. In its present stage it called forth no blush to her cheek, no feelings of shame and self-reproach, no twinges of conscience that in loving him she was injuring his wife.

But his actual presence would revolutionize all this. To see him, to speak with him once more, to live, perhaps, under the same roof, to receive his grateful acknowledgment of her services, feeling all the while that she must keep the door of her lips and measure every word and glance lest her secret should peep out—that was a prospect which filled her with dismay and anxiety.



Young as she was, and inexperienced in the ways of the world, she felt that what was harmless and innocent in the abstract might be most improper in the concrete. And the question which arose in her troubled mind was, Could she school herself into regarding the actual Vere as being of different identity with the Vere of her secret worship? Unlike the heroines of a certain school of novelists (we don't profess to say whether or no they exist in real life), Psyche was not addicted either to much intro—or retro—spection. Her vivacious temperament, her keen zest for the pleasures life holds in store for those who have youth and strength to enjoy them, and a certain incisiveness of judgment founded on healthy and common-sense views of her vocation, prevented her from indulging in any morbid forebodings as to the possible results of any given course of action, or in useless repinings when the possible had become actual. She was anything but *intense*, in the æsthetic meaning of the word, although equally far removed from being superficial. But here was a case which had not been “dreamed of in her philosophy,” and one in which she could seek for neither counsel nor assistance save from her own heart—a poor resource under the circumstances, as she herself, knowing its bias, candidly owned. Her love for Vere, slow and imperceptible as had been its growth, had become so much a part of herself, that she felt to pluck it out was a sheer impossibility. As an alternative there remained the determination to conceal it, to hedge it carefully round with an impenetrable barrier of duty and friendship, and this she resolved to do.

Having decided this knotty point, Psyche sat herself down and indited a long epistle to her cousin. In giving him full details of her interview with his father, she naturally omitted those which related to herself personally, and which had just given her so much food for reflection. “Mind you write at once,” she said, in conclusion, “to say how glad you are to receive his forgiveness. Tell him that you only await his permission to come over and pay him a visit; and meanwhile I will take an opportunity of letting him know how you are situated. I find that Aunt Mary thought it better not to avail herself of your permission to inform him of your marriage at the time, and I must not conceal from you my dread that he may find in it some fresh cause for offence. But that is all the more reason that you should write to him in a conciliatory spirit, *by return of post*, and I will do all in my power to smooth away difficulties.”

This letter she despatched before descending to dinner, fearing lest her uncle might see fit to withdraw his permission. The wisdom of this step was amply demonstrated, when, in answer to the summons of the dinner-bell, she hurried down-stairs to join the family in the dining-room. As she crossed the hall the squire appeared at the door of his study.

“If you haven't written yet, leave it for a day or two,” he said, moodily. “I want a little more time to think it over.”

“But I have, dear, and sent the letter to the post. Surely you don't wish to retract your promise?”



"No; but I don't like being hurried. Well, look ye here, child, don't breathe a word of this to your aunt or any of them till he replies. We don't know how he'll take it, and it's no use humiliating myself before them" (with a contemptuous jerk in the direction of the dining-room) "for nothing."

"I'll answer for Vere," cried the girl, taking his hand; "but, meanwhile, I'll do as you wish."

"That's a good girl. You've got more sense than all the rest put together."

Young Holdsworth was again of the party. He had been shooting with Captain Compton and Charlie, and had not required much persuasion to induce him to stay, with the chance of seeing Miss Psyche once more. He was decidedly fascinated by her charms, and although thus far his intentions consisted of nothing more definite than a desire to while away his spare time in a mild flirtation, his condition of mind was such that a very slight encouragement might lead to more serious results.

Unfortunately for him, he misconstrued Psyche's abstracted demeanor, and her evident condition of suppressed excitement, as symptomatic of a growing attraction towards himself. And when, after dinner, the young people adjourned to the garden, and the girl, feeling that she had treated their visitor's efforts to entertain her rather coldly, endeavored to compensate him by a little extra attention, the kindness of her manner helped to foster the delusion, and forged another link in the chain which he was only too ready to assume.

As a matter of fact, Psyche was so little of a coquette, and so much accustomed to male society, that, finding the youth companionable and amusing, she readily assumed with him a tone of friendly intimacy, which seemed to him to promise something warmer than was really meant. From her long attachment to Vere, she had come to regard herself almost as an affianced bride, and was quite free from the conventional bashfulness of the unappropriated virgin in presence of a possible suitor.

In the course of conversation a question had arisen with regard to an historical event, dating from the time of the first Napoleon, on which Psyche was alone able to furnish accurate information.

"I can't understand what it is that makes you so different from other girls," remarked young Holdsworth, who had successfully manœuvred to secure a *tête-à-tête* with her when, the discussion over, the little party dispersed in different directions.

"Do you suppose that we are all cast in the same mould, and turned out by the gross like china dolls?" asked Psyche, amused at his earnest wonderment.

"I don't mean in personal appearance, though you have the pull there too. But, don't you know, clever women, as a rule, are such bores, and, when they're strong-minded into the bargain, they're simply abominable, to my mind."

"Perhaps that's the fault of your mind, and not altogether theirs. But what am I to infer from this ferocious onslaught on



my sex? You surely don't mean to include me in the obnoxious category?"

"Yes, I do, so far as the cleverness and strength of will."

"I'm glad to hear you don't consider me quite a fool."

"As if I could! it's more likely the other way."

"What? You regard me as an abominable bore? Thanks, very much."

"I wish you wouldn't chaff a fellow like that, when he tries to talk seriously."

"Oh yes, I know, you intend to pay me a pretty compliment, but I don't like compliments. It always seems to me a man must hold a very low opinion of a woman's intelligence when he considers it necessary to interlard his conversation with flattery more or less insincere."

"But mine was not insincere, nor did I intend to flatter you; I like you too well for that," said the lieutenant, in a tone of frank friendliness that quite disarmed her suspicion that he was trying to amuse himself at her expense.

"Then I apologize," replied Psyche, smiling pleasantly; "and to prove my contrition, I'll do my best to enlighten you on the subject of your doubt. Is it not due to the fact that, having been educated in France, and naturally knowing a little more of its history than the ordinary English school-girl, I should have ventured to assert my opinion before two such competent military critics as Captain Compton and yourself?"

"I think we had better not return to the subject, because, if I spoke the truth, you'd be sure to think I was trying to flatter you; and I want to keep friends for my last day."

"Your last day? Are you leaving, then?"

"Yes, I have to rejoin the regiment to-morrow; leave's up, worse luck!"

"I'm sorry for that. I think my uncle intends taking the hounds out again to-morrow, and looked forward to seeing you in the forefront of the battle."

"Thanks, awfully! I wish I could. I shall think of you when I'm back grinding on duty, and I hope you won't forget me altogether," said the young man, gloomily.

"I never forget my friends; perhaps you'll be able to return before the end of the season, and we may enjoy another good run together."

"I'll see if it can't be worked. I've never had such a jolly time," he said, heartily; adding, in an undertone, "I wish you'd give me that flower."

"I declare we're getting quite sentimental, but you shall have it if you like," replied Psyche, with an amused smile. "I wonder how long your grief at parting will outlast my memento?"

Young Holdsworth was about to reply, when Mrs. Compton and her children appeared and put an end to the conversation, or at least to its confidential tone.

Three days later Mr. Danvers received a letter from Vere, and summoned Psyche into the study to hear its contents.



"It's satisfactory enough as far as it goes," said the old man, trying hard to conceal his delight. "The young dog sees the error of his ways, though he's too proud to say so, and he's longing to see me again. There, my dear, read that. Silly boy, why didn't he write before?"

"He's like you, dear; and like me. I'm afraid we're an obstinate lot."

"Well, I'm glad he's had the decency to make the first overture, though I don't mind saying to you I'm heartily glad to be friends again. That boy had more in him than all the others."

"You'll have reason to be proud of him one of these days; he's rising in his profession most wonderfully. I should not be a bit surprised if he gets a picture into the Academy next year. I know he intends to try, and he generally carries his purposes through."

"Determination is very well even in young people; but it may be carried too far," said Mr. Danvers, sententiously. "Look what he's lost by his stubbornness; and what for? To become a dauber of canvas—a poor devil whose very existence depends on the favor of picture-dealers and such cattle."

"It doubtless has its drawbacks; but the artist's is a noble profession, and his life a happy one," cried Psyche, enthusiastically. "Think of the delight of studying Nature in her most charming aspects, not out of mere dilettanteism, but with a view to reproducing them for the gratification of thousands, and the attainment of one's own undying fame."

"All that jargon sounds very well. But you won't persuade me that the boy is happier as he is than if he had had the sense to lead the life for which he was intended."

"Well, dear, I won't argue the point; I'll leave that for Vere when he comes. By-the-bye, I don't think I told you that he has another advocate to plead his cause—the cause of Art and Beauty," she said, assuming a vivacity of manner which at the moment she was far from feeling.

"He doesn't need any other advocate than you," replied her uncle, in a playful strain. "You're artful enough and comely enough for anything."

"Wait till you've seen Carmen."

"Carmen! Who the devil's Carmen?"

"His wife, and my dearest friend," faltered Psyche, anxiously noting the portents of a coming storm. Then, in the hope of averting the outbreak, she continued, with breathless eagerness, "I thought you'd be surprised; but, you see, it was no use telling you till you had *promised to be friends*," laying great stress on these words. "Of course, under other circumstances, he would have written to let you know and ask your advice; but you see, as it was, he felt so lonely and uncared for. No wonder he fell in love with Carmen; you should just see her—the prettiest girl I ever met, and so nice too. We were at school together. In fact I—I persuaded Vere to—to go over to her."

"Oh! so you persuaded him to go over to her, did you?" said Mr.



Danvers, white with passion. "Then you may just persuade him to remain where he is. I don't want any foreign women, with their heathenish names and ways over here, I can tell you."

"But, Uncle Hugh, you haven't seen her—you don't know her."

"And, what's more—I don't mean to! Do you think I'll allow a son of mine to disgrace the family name like that? Some pink-cheeked minx, I'll be bound. And then to try and slink back like a whipped cur behind the shelter of her petticoats! Zounds, miss! do you take me for a fool?"

"You've no right to speak of my friend in that way; nor, indeed, to address such language to me at all," said Psyche, thoroughly roused.

"Hold your tongue, miss, or I shall do you an injury. I've been the victim of the grossest deception, and I retract my forgiveness. The disobedient young puppy!"

"You can do as you like about that; but if you think that I shall remain in your house after your treatment of me, you are mistaken," she replied, rising and ringing the bell. "I suppose I may order the carriage to take me over to the station?"

Mr. Danvers looked aghast. To be bearded in his own den like this was something altogether outside of his experience, and in the very novelty of the situation lay an element of comicality.

"Come, come, my girl, I didn't mean to be angry with *you*; though, Heaven knows, I have the right to be for your share in this infamous transaction," he said, in milder tones.

"Be as angry as you like; you won't think worse of me than I do of *you*," she answered, coldly. "You insult my friend, you allow me to make promises in your name which you decline to fulfil, you threaten me with personal violence when I try to justify myself, and then you kindly tell me you're not angry with me."

Just then a servant answered the bell, and Psyche, turning to her uncle, asked him to give the necessary orders for her departure.

Again the squire halted between the fear of losing his niece and the dread of sacrificing his dignity.

"A plague seize the women and their fussing and fuming! I know how to deal with a man, but d—n me if this girl isn't a match for any two!" he growled under his breath. Then, turning on the unfortunate domestic, "What the devil are you gaping in the doorway for? Get outside, and wait till you're told to come in."

"Am I to order the carriage myself?" repeated Psyche, in her iciest tones, as the trembling maid withdrew.

"Certainly not. Now, look here, my dear, be reasonable. I tell you, I didn't mean any offence. What more do you want? You don't expect me to go down on my knees to crave for pardon?"

It was Psyche's turn to appear to hesitate. For all her bold front and defiant attitude, she had no intention of leaving if she could possibly avoid it, because she knew perfectly well that without the influence of her continual presence Vere's cause would be hopelessly lost. At the same time it was essential to the maintenance of that influence that she should assert her dignity, and prove that her uncle's wrath had no terrors for her.



"I don't expect you to do anything so ridiculous; but I do expect that a man calling himself a gentleman should behave as such towards a lady and a guest—even though she be his niece," she replied, still on the defensive.

"Yes, yes, no doubt I was wrong; but you know I am a little hasty in my temper, and it was enough to make a saint swear," said the squire, apologetically. "Come, give me a kiss, and make it up like a good child."

"You withdraw your offensive expressions about Vere and his wife? I tell you she's a charming girl, and a perfect lady," said Psyche, offering her cheek.

Mr. Danvers made a horrible grimace. In his eagerness to make peace he had almost forgotten the original cause of his wrath, which these words called in evidence. "I suppose I must take your word for it," he said at last. "But that does not make me any the more bound to receive her as my daughter-in-law. I never did like foreigners, and I'm too old to begin to try."

"*Do*, just to please me," urged his niece, in her most coaxing tone.

"I sha'n't make any more rash promises with a little spitfire like you at my elbow to jump down my throat if I don't carry them out to the letter."

"But you allow that you promised to receive Vere again?"

"But not his wife—for the all-sufficient reason that I didn't think he would have been such an idiot. Never mind, I'll be as good as my word. Since you will have it, let him come; but alone, mind, or else he may stop away altogether." And with this decision, Psyche deemed it wise to appear contented for the present.

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## CHAPTER XII.

"Friendship is constant in all other things  
Save in the office and affairs of love."—SHAKESPEARE.

THE receipt of Psyche's letter, containing the unlooked-for intimation of his father's disposition to reopen friendly relations, had caused no small ferment in Vere's mind.

Knowing the squire's ineradicable prejudices, he fully shared his cousin's fears as to the effect the announcement of his marriage might have on their prospects of a permanent reconciliation. And, with this dread, he hesitated to communicate the news to Carmen, lest it should give rise to hopes which might be disappointed; and leave her besides with the uncomfortable reflection that she had been a stumbling-block in the way of his restoration to paternal favor. Not that he thought this last consideration would weigh very heavily with her. He almost wished it might have been so that he could have felt assured that the partner of his cares and joys would be as ready to participate in the former as she was to monopolize the latter.



Unfortunately, his short experience of married life had forced him to the conclusion that, with all her charms of face and manner, his wife was entirely wanting in intellectual sympathy and steady purpose; in fact, was little else but a pretty, wayward child.

To a man of Vere's stamp of mind this discovery was by no means a pleasant one. His knowledge of the opposite sex—based principally upon his intimate acquaintance with his cousin Psyche—had led him to form a very lofty ideal of what a helpmate might and should be. And, although he gratefully acknowledged the wealth of affection which his beautiful bride was ever ready to lavish upon him, he missed the intelligent interest and helpfulness in the more serious concerns of life that should have made her a trusted friend as well as a loving companion. He could not help feeling that her pretty, inconsequent ways, her sudden fits of petulance, followed by remorseful and ardent protestations of extravagant affection—charming as they were in the abstract, and from a lover's point of view—might become monotonous after a lengthened experience. And yet, when he strove to take her to task, and hinted ever so gently that her conduct scarcely befitted her present state, she only stared with wide-open eyes, and either laughed at him for a cross old Bluebeard or reproached him with a torrent of tears for his lack of affection.

"I see how it is—you don't love me. You never loved me as I loved you," she would cry. "I wish I were dead, or back at the Pension!" And then, of course, he had to take her in his arms and console her as best he might, and all the intended effect of the lecture was lost.

Still, he never allowed himself either in thought or word to reproach her for the disappointment which he felt was due to his own unconsidered and impulsive action in engaging himself to a girl of whose character he knew so little.

"Psyche has spoiled me for other women," he used to say to himself; "she led me to expect too much. Commonplaces don't go down after masterpieces."

And so he wisely made up his mind to bring down the level of his expectations, and accommodate himself to his wife as she was. True to this resolution, he was unvarying in his kindness and consideration, and sought in his work consolation for the disenchantment which a closer experience of connubial bliss had wrought.

As a matter of fact, Carmen was not entirely to blame. Their natures were so widely divergent, that she could as little understand his motives and aims as he could hers. They were like two strangers, of different race and customs, trying to discourse, each in his own tongue, on a subject which presented itself in a totally different aspect to each.

His natural reserve she misconstrued into indifference, his occasional fits of abstraction into studied neglect. And the very kindness with which he encountered her gusts of temper gave rise to the suspicion that his love for her was cold, or, at best, lukewarm.

Love indeed, in her conception, meant a perpetual state of fren-



zied passion. She would have had him alternately adoring and raging, now as the devoted lover, now as the masterful despot. She felt she could have even submitted to occasional cruelty so long as she knew that his love was hers indeed, for the sake of the ecstasies of reconciliation. But a state of steady, sober, unvarying affection such as he offered her did not seem to her to be worthy of the name of love at all.

In her distress at this imaginary discovery she longed for a sympathetic companion, to whom she could confide her doubts and fears, and, if possible, have them argued away. But, unfortunately, there was none such at hand. Her erst bosom friend, Psyche, was in England; and although she hardly as yet dared confess it to herself, Carmen had begun to entertain feelings not far removed from jealousy for her husband's warm ally and constant correspondent. Since their marriage she fancied that she had discovered a marked change in the tone of her old school-fellow's letters, and a still more marked falling-off in their frequency. Formerly Carmen had been accustomed to lay bare her most secret thoughts to her "dear sister," as she had elected to designate Psyche; and the latter, although perhaps not so effusive, had never failed to reply in a strain which satisfied the younger girl's craving for sympathy and affection. But now—well, Carmen was forced to allow that the first falling away had been on her side; still, she felt that she no longer occupied the first place in her friend's thoughts. When Psyche wrote to her at all, it was in her character as Vere's wife that she addressed her, and all her questions, counsels, and suggestions proved that Carmen was subordinated in the writer's mind, and her very identity merged in that of her husband. While, to add to the offence—particularly of late—Psyche's communications to her often took the form of messages or enclosures in more lengthy and apparently important missives addressed to Vere.

More than once the girl determined to open her heart to her husband, and bid him either dissipate her fears once for all, or confirm them, and let her know the full extent of her misery. But pride, dread of ridicule, and a certain zest of maiden modesty, restrained her. Thus the feelings of estrangement and incipient jealousy, although carefully concealed, were beginning to take root deep in her heart, and threatened to starve out and overlay the genuine affection which she entertained for the man of her choice.

One morning at breakfast Carmen remarked that her husband—who had received a letter from England in Psyche's well-known handwriting on the previous afternoon—seemed unusually silent and abstracted. Two or three times she surprised his glance fixed upon her in a meditative manner, as though he had something important on his mind and was debating whether to give utterance to it or not. But still, he said nothing; and at last the girl, irritated beyond endurance, broke out passionately, "Vere, are you dumb to-day, that you sit staring at me like a mute? You have hardly spoken two words since you received that letter."

"Haven't I, dear? Well, to tell the truth, I've been thinking, and



I can't think and talk at the same time," he answered, good-temperedly

"At any rate, you might share your thoughts with me. I don't ask to be admitted into your secrets; *that* privilege seems to be reserved for your cousin, but I don't like to be left quite in the dark by myself."

"Poor child! Was she badly treated? Well, never mind; you shall know all by-and-by."

"But I want to know now, this instant," cried Carmen, stamping her little foot with vexation at his apparent indifference to her wounded feelings.

"Seriously? Very well, then you shall help me to decide. I may have to go over to England shortly on important business, and I was wondering whether you would like to accompany me or not."

"To England? At this time of year—in the season of fogs? It will be so cold and miserable. And then crossing the sea—ugh!" shuddered Carmen.

"That's just what I thought. It's getting a little late for a child of the sun like you to undertake so long a journey. And yet I don't like to leave my poor little wife alone."

"Why must you go; why not wait till next summer? Then we can go together, and you shall show me all the sights of London, as you did of Paris," said the girl, rising and placing her arm coaxingly round his neck, and laying her cheek close to his.

"It's a matter of great importance, or I shouldn't dream of it. I don't know anything for certain yet; but if I get the summons I expect, I must go at once, or not at all."

"Let it be not at all. Stay with me, darling. What is business compared with love?"

"To love you must live; to live you must have money; to get money, you must—or, rather, I must—attend to business," didactically replied Vere, pressing a kiss on her expectant lips, and then gently disengaging himself from her embrace. "There's nothing definitely settled at present, but I thought you ought to be prepared."

"I call it very cruel of you to think of leaving me all alone," she cried, with a little pout, although her anger had melted before the tokens of his affectionate thought for her.

"You sha'n't be alone. If you decide not to accompany me—and perhaps it will be wiser to do so—we will invite one of the Demoiselles Delaforet to keep you company, or you might spend a few days with them. In any case I shall not be long absent."

Carmen had had it on her tongue at the beginning of the conversation to ask him whether Psyche's letter was the cause of this sudden resolution. But her uneasy suspicions once at rest, she had no desire to pursue so distasteful a theme, and the word business was associated in her mind with everything unpleasant.

At this moment too the current of her thoughts was changed by the arrival of an invitation to dinner from M. de Malsherbes.

Vere read the note in silence, and tossed it across to his wife, observing, "Shall we refuse? I don't care to go if you don't."



"But I *do* care to go very much. I am dying to see the interior of the château," she cried, excitedly. "Besides, it would seem so rude, being the first time we are asked."

"As you like," replied Vere, indifferently. "It's an awful bore having to go out among strangers; but I don't want to offend our neighbor, and if it pleases you, we will accept. I hope he's not going to overwhelm us with his civilities."

"That's ungrateful, Vere. You know M. de Malsherbes told us that he never entertains now, and by making an exception in our favor he is treating us with especial honor. I thought you said you liked him the other day after he had called to see you?"

"I like him well enough, for the matter of that. He is agreeable, polite, and seems clever; but, at the same time, I have no great desire to cultivate too close an intimacy."

"You ought to be only too glad to have so distinguished a man for a friend," cried Carmen. "Think how it will add to your reputation; and I'm sure he's nice."

Vere thought it was useless to discuss the subject further, so merely observed, "Perhaps I am rather difficult in the matter of friends. Anyhow, I shall require to know more of M. le Vicomte before I regard him as one. However, if you really wish it, we will accept his invitation. Remember, though, it will entail a return; and you and Louise will have all the trouble of elaborating a *menu* suitable to so exalted a visitor."

"Oh, he's very simple in his tastes; he told me so himself. And then, Vere, Louise is a perfect treasure; she can cook anything," she replied, with a proud assumption of housewifely knowledge.

"She ought to be good for something; she certainly doesn't shine in personal beauty. Her face is sour enough to turn the cream," remarked Vere, dryly. He did not like the woman. There was something in her cat-like and stealthy movements, and in her habit of regarding him out of the corners of her eyes, which had a most irritating effect upon him.

"She's certainly not lovely, nor amiable in appearance," laughed Carmen; "but she's a good servant, and Madame Bouchard says she has a sad history. Her husband was a brute, and used to beat her."

"I can almost sympathize with him," began Vere, and then suddenly checked himself as the subject of their conversation glided noiselessly into the room.

The approaching festivity at the château engrossed Carmen's attention for the next day or two to the exclusion of all other topics, and she failed to revert even casually to Vere's possible departure. And this, although it was scarcely flattering to his self-love, was a subject of inward congratulation to her husband, as, pending a reply to the letter he had addressed to his father, he was scarcely in a position to decide on any definite course of action.

On the appointed evening the young couple arrived at the dilapidated mansion, and were met in the vestibule by the vicomte, who bade them most heartily welcome, and conducted them into the



grand salon, which had evidently undergone a process of scrubbing and polishing for their reception. Although the evening was mild, there was a feeling of damp uninhabitedness about the spacious tapestried apartment, and the fire of crackling logs was by no means ungrateful.

"I hope you will not think me remiss in not having any other ladies to meet you," said their host; "but I have lived so long out of the world, that I have lost all my former friends. Then, too, selfishly speaking, I anticipate more pleasure from being able to devote myself to making the nearer acquaintance of my charming neighbors than if I had to entertain a large party of comparative strangers."

"We like it better so," replied Carmen, charmed by his affability, and not a little dazzled by his airs of grand seigneur, "do we not, Vere? Ah! my husband is busy looking at your works of art! He thinks of nothing else."

"For my part, I prefer the beauty of Nature," said M. de Malsherbes, with a glance of thinly veiled admiration at the face of his lovely companion.

The girl smiled, and blushed with pleasure. She could see no harm in such respectful homage. After all, she *was* beautiful, and why should she be ashamed, or others afraid, to acknowledge the fact?

"Vere's theory is, that Art is the perpetuation of natural beauty. What is that favorite quotation of his?—something about life being short, but Art lasting forever. Is that correct? I am no scholar," she remarked, loyally endeavoring to defend her husband's position.

"*Ars longa vita brevis est!* Perfectly correct and perfectly true, in one sense," replied the vicomte, gallantly. "Believe me, dear lady, did I need conversion your words would have the desired effect. But I maintain that, in another sense, Art is the handmaid of Nature, and living beauty must transcend its most immaculate representation, as I am sure M. Danvers would be the first to admit."

"He will not admit so much to me; but then, he thinks I am vain enough already," laughed Carmen, appropriating, as a matter of course, her host's generalizations as a delicate compliment addressed to herself.

"What is that I will not admit?" asked Vere, turning round to join in the conversation after a prolonged inspection of one or two really fine paintings which adorned the walls.

"That a pretty woman is more lovely than her portrait, however perfect," exclaimed Carmen, filled with a childish desire to show her husband that others appreciated her beauty justly if *he* did not. "M. de Malsherbes quite agrees with me."

"Doubtless he is too polite to differ from a lady on so trivial a subject," replied Vere, dryly. This eagerness for admiration which his wife so openly displayed was a source of intense annoyance to him; and particularly in the presence of a man like their present entertainer, whose antecedents would not lead him to place much faith in the childlike simplicity from which it emanated.



The announcement of dinner caused a welcome break in the conversation. Even M. de Malsherbes was getting a little embarrassed by Carmen's want of tact in repeating to her husband that which had been meant solely for her own private delectation.

The dining-room was a spacious and lofty apartment panelled entirely in black oak. From the centre of the ceiling depended a chandelier of antique brass-work, supporting a single lamp, which shed a subdued light over the table, and left the rest of the room in comparative obscurity. Three massive chairs, with red velvet seats and high backs, elaborately carved and surmounted by a coronet, occupied a segment of the large circular table, which had no covering save the glass and plate of the dinner equipment and a few vases containing flowers.

In a corner of the room, adjoining a sliding panel which communicated with the kitchen, stood a small carving-table, illuminated by a solitary candle, whose feeble rays seemed only to make the surrounding darkness more apparent. Peering curiously into the gloom, Carmen could just distinguish the outline of two massive buffets from behind the glass fronts of which there appeared a glimmer of silver dishes and covers. Along the walls, at intervals, shadowy projections faintly defined themselves into antlers, boars' heads, and other trophies of the chase, and under these a dozen or more chairs of the same stiff pattern as those they were about to occupy, were ranged with mathematical precision.

Altogether, the first *coup d'œil* was not suggestive of gayety or hilarity; and the solemn, gray-haired domestic, in a faded livery, who stood behind his master's chair waiting his signal to remove the covers, presented a funereal appearance well in keeping with the subdued melancholy of his surroundings.

However, as the meal progressed, the dulness which at first seemed to oppress the little party was dissipated, and gave place to lively conversation, in which their host and Carmen took the leading part. The viands were well cooked and nicely served, while the wine was unexceptionable. M. de Malsherbes had quite shaken off his air of habitual melancholy. He fulfilled his duties as host with the easy grace of a man who had not forgotten the ways of polite society, keeping his guests entertained with a fund of anecdotes relating to the Paris of his day, when he had been a notoriety and a favored visitor at all the fashionable salons.

Vere was no great talker, being naturally of a reflective turn of mind; but the lively chatter of his entertainer, although it was mainly egotistical, kept him amused; while to Carmen, this glimpse of high life, this vivacious description of the sayings and doings of historical personages, by one who had moved among them as one of themselves, afforded unalloyed pleasure. In the excitement of recalling and detailing his reminiscences, the vicomte's eyes sparkled and his pale cheeks flushed, so that he looked quite handsome, and the girl found herself marvelling how so interesting and good-looking a man could have been reduced to the lonely misanthrope he was when first they had known him. Much as she loved her husband—



regarding him, hitherto, as the most perfect specimen of manhood she had met, it seemed to her that he was dwarfed and driven into the shade by the brilliancy of their new friend. Insensibly she compared Vere's slow and unimaginative style of conversation with the flow of language—sometimes witty, sometimes impassioned, but always interesting—which M. de Malsherbes commanded, and the comparison hardly tended in favor of the former.

When they adjourned into the salon the vicomte implored her to sing, and applauded her efforts with an ecstatic enthusiasm that thrilled her with pride and delight. Being herself intensely emotional, she appreciated these outward demonstrations of gratification which Vere was always so slow to express. When she was glad, she liked to laugh; when sorrowful, to weep. She could not understand feeling emotion without giving expression to it, and in this she was at one with their host.

"I hope Monsieur Danvers will not consider me too selfish in keeping you so long at the piano," remarked M. de Malsherbes, as he urged Carmen to sing once more. "It is so great a treat to me, and I feel sure that he, as an artist, must participate in my pleasure."

"I am very fond of music," replied Vere; "but I think we ought to hear a song from you, to make a change in the programme."

"Ah! *do*, please," cried Carmen, persuasively. "I am sure you sing yourself."

"Very little, and not for years," said the vicomte, deprecatingly. "I used to sing duets with my poor mother; she had a charming voice, poor, dear lady! Something like yours, madame, but neither so powerful nor so sympathetic."

"What did you sing? Ah, here is '*La ci darem la mano*.' I know Zerlina's part, if you can take Don Giovanni. It is lovely. Let us try it."

"There is nothing I should like better, if you will allow me," replied M. de Malsherbes, glancing quickly towards Vere, and then into the smiling face of the fair enthusiast seated at the piano.

Was he to attach a double meaning to her words? In his present state of romantic excitement the idea set his pulses throbbing at railway speed. All his old instincts were reviving under the fascination of this beautiful apparition. She was clearly touched by his devotion and by his past suffering; and when a woman's pity is once engaged—*ça ira loin!* That cold-blooded Englishman, her husband, was not capable of satisfying the imaginations of an ardent, impressionable nature like hers. She wanted fire, romance, sympathy, adoration; such as he, Victor de Malsherbes, a kindred spirit, alone could offer.

As their voices rose, now singly, now together, in Mozart's bewitching melody, the infatuated dreamer felt that he was pleading his own passion, and that Carmen knew it and was responding favorably to his entreaties. His brain was on fire, and he sang with an exaggerated pathos, suiting his actions to the words, until, in the exaltation of the finale, he could scarcely withhold himself from clasping the



lovely Zerlina to his bosom in a manner warmer even than is authorized by stage etiquette.

"I must congratulate you on your performance. It is really quite operatic," remarked Vere, in amused tones, as the excited singer, just recollecting himself in time, began wiping his heated brow vigorously to mask his confusion. "And now, Carmen, it is getting late, and I think we had better say good-night."

"Pray don't go yet, the evening has been so short," urged M. de Malsherbes; "and I should so much like to try another duet with madame."

But Vere was inexorable. In the first place, he was beginning to weary of an entertainment in which he was allotted the position of mere spectator; and then, although he was far removed from the faintest suspicion of what was passing in the vicomte's mind, he did not altogether approve his manner towards Carmen. The rolling eyes and passionate gesticulations might be in keeping with the music, and were, as he imagined, merely assumed for the occasion. Still, this buffoonery with another man's wife jarred against his notions of what was fit, and he determined to avoid a repetition of it.

Accordingly, after many protestations of regard from their eccentric host, the young people took their departure.

As they walked home together through the park neither spoke much. Carmen was the first to break the silence. "What a charming man, and what a delightful evening we have spent!" she said, with a regretful sigh, as they reached their modest chalet, which stood out sharply defined in the light of the brilliant October moon. It looked a poor little cottage compared with the spacious chateau, and the girl's heart was filled with vague, ambitious yearnings after grandeur and magnificence awakened by the vicomte's interesting reminiscences.

At length Vere replied, "I'm glad you think so. I found it infernally dull, and M. de Malsherbes is a good deal too *stagey* to please me."

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## CHAPTER XIII.

"Trifles light as air  
Are to the jealous confirmation strong  
As proofs of Holy Writ."—SHAKESPEARE.

DURING the next few days Carmen could talk of nothing else but of M. de Malsherbes and his manifold perfections.

Although anything but strong-minded in the ordinary acceptance of the term, the girl was endowed with extraordinary persistency in pursuit of any purpose which, for the time being, attracted her wayward fancies. She had a habit of shutting her eyes to everything else—of thinking, talking, and dreaming even of nothing but the one all-absorbing object of interest, which made her a very undesirable companion for any one whose sympathies ran counter to her own.



Her life had been so circumscribed, her sphere of action so cramped, that her ardent imagination had never found space in which to try its wings, and ascertain definitely how far its actual capabilities corresponded with the soaring aspirations that made her petty round of every-day occupations seem so monotonous and unsatisfying.

For a time her friendship with Psyche had sufficed to fill the void occasioned by the disappearance of her father, and to make her solitary and bereaved condition less insupportable. Then came her intimacy with Vere—which began, so to speak, long before she actually knew him—when the newly awakened fire of love absorbed and consumed the gentler flame of girlish friendship.

In the short, sweet days of courtship Vere had been her idol, her godhead; and she asked for nothing better than to be allowed to pour out her whole soul in worship, to live as his adoring slave.

But Vere, partly from conscientious motives, and mainly because, with his less emotional nature, he was unable to enter into her feelings, set his face against this frenzied idolatry, and in striving by his own matter-of-fact example to moderate his wife's outward demonstrations of affection, had incurred the risk of extinguishing the love which gave them birth.

Sympathy, in its broadest interpretation, was a necessity of Carmen's existence. She needed some one constantly at her side to lean upon and to look up to. She would have liked her husband to have remained always her lover, to have been continually reiterating the tale of his affection, and claiming the assurance of its return.

All this seemed like simple childishness to Vere, and he declined to encourage a state of mind which he felt was neither healthy nor dignified.

Smarting under a sense of injury, and humiliated by what she chose to regard as a rebuff to her affection, Carmen found in the attentions and admiration of M. de Malsherbes a welcome salve to her wounded pride. For the vicomte personally she cared nothing as yet. But the idea had entered her perverse little head that, by his instrumentality, her husband might be roused from the coldness and indifference into which she feared he was lapsing. And having once adopted this theory, regardless of the risks she was running, she pursued it with an indefatigable pertinacity most trying to Vere's patience.

"My dear Carmen," he exclaimed, at last goaded into open remonstrance, "don't you think we have had nearly enough of M. de Malsherbes? I will allow that he is all you appear to think him; but since he can never be more to us than a casual acquaintance, we can surely spend our time better than in perpetually discussing his merits."

"You may think so, but it doesn't follow of necessity that I should agree with you," she persisted, hoping to wring from him some expression of jealousy, some token, however slight, to prove that her deep-laid scheme was having the desired effect.



Vere only smiled and shrugged his shoulders as he replied, in a tone of indifference, "Of course, you have a right to your own opinions, as I have to mine, and we can at least agree to differ. After all, it isn't a matter of much moment. What a lovely afternoon! I am going for a stroll in the forest with my sketch-book. Will you come, too? You might bring your block and help me to compose a picture. You never do any painting now. It's a pity, for you showed decided talent when you were my pupil."

"I'm sick of pictures and painting!" the girl began, passionately; then checking herself, as the recollection of those blissful days rose within her mind, she crossed over to her husband, and, putting her arms round his neck, added, in a softened tone, "Don't be angry with me, Vere; I'll go with you if you wish; I'll do anything if you'll only be kind and love me as you used."

"My dear child, how can you be so silly?" exclaimed Vere, thoroughly puzzled, and not a little dismayed at the prospect of a scene. "I only want you to do what you like—what will make you happy. And as for loving you, how can I love you more than I do? Have I not proved the sincerity of my affection by making you my wife?"

"But that's not enough! Men don't always love their wives," cried Carmen, bursting into tears and burying her face on his shoulder. "And if I ever thought that you loved anybody else better than me, I would kill myself and you too!"

"Really, Carmen, this is too childish!" he began, hardly knowing whether to soothe or scold her into a more reasonable frame of mind. "Once for all, I tell you that I love you dearly, but this absurd behavior—" He was interrupted by the sound of wheels outside, followed by a knock at the door. Involuntarily his voice assumed a sterner tone at the prospect of their being surprised in what was painfully like a matrimonial squabble. "For goodness' sake, Carmen, dry your eyes and recover your senses," he cried, impatiently, disengaging himself from her grasp.

The girl's eyes flashed fire, but before she could reply Louise appeared, announcing a visitor in the person of Mademoiselle Hortense Delaforet.

"Show her into the salon," said Vere, curtly. Then, annoyed by the curious glances the woman was casting towards Carmen's tear-stained face, he continued, angrily, "What are you waiting for? Didn't you hear me?"

"I thought perhaps monsieur might like me to say that he and madame were not at home," said Louise, with her habitual cynical smile.

"Please not to think, but do as you're bid. You needn't say anything about me; I am going out," cried Vere, exasperated. Then turning to Carmen, who stood sobbing in sullen silence, "I suppose you must see her, as she knows you are in; but you had better wait till you have recovered your composure, or we shall have it spread all over Boisy-la-Reine that we have been quarreling. That woman is an inveterate tattler."



Carmen had dried her tears, but still remained silent. The storm that might have cleared the atmosphere had been checked in mid-career, and its only effect had been to leave her mind heaving with passionate and troublous thoughts, through which a vague sense of dissatisfaction with her husband, with herself, and with the whole world, made itself felt. For a moment she thought of refusing to receive her visitor, if only to spite Vere, but then, on reflection, she changed her mind. Even an unsympathetic confidant was preferable to none at all.

Meanwhile, Vere, after waiting vainly for a reply, moved slowly towards the door, intent on making his escape by the back of the house. He had never cared much for the second Mademoiselle Delaforet, and he was not at all desirous of seeing her now. In his absence Carmen might perhaps recover her senses. At any rate, he had no mind to be made a party to another scene in the presence of a stranger.

Before leaving the room he turned to take another look at his wife. Something in her attitude and the mournful fixity of her gaze touched him with a feeling of compassion, she appeared so like a little child that had been scolded and left to fight out its infantile grief alone. After all, what was she but a grown-up baby? And so, although he felt the whole affair was nothing but a storm in a tea-cup, for which he could not in any wise be held answerable, he approached her with a kindly smile.

"Come, darling, let the sun shine again; I'm sorry if I seemed cross; but upon my word I don't know what there was to cry about. Come, kiss me, and let's make it up."

Instantly her face cleared. "Oh, Vere, if you only knew how I love you!" she murmured, in a soft undertone, as she nestled up to him.

"Yes, I know, my pet," he replied, tenderly. Then, dreading another relapse into the heroics, he gently tore himself away and quit-  
ted the room.

As he wandered forth into the cool, shady forest, rich in bright autumn tints, he breathed a deep sigh of relief. The contrast between the calm peacefulness of Nature and the atmosphere of feverish unrest that seemed to prevail in his own habitation was striking and almost painful. Where was the idyllic happiness of which he had dreamed when he had first thought of making Carmen his life's companion? Was their whole joint existence to be passed thus, in a perpetual series of tempestuous scenes, apropos of nothing? If so, it was a mournful outlook.

Presently he sat down on a moss-covered stone and tried to sketch. But eye and hand played him false, and he threw down his pencil in disgust.

"If this sort of thing continues," he thought, "good-by to hopes of artistic success. A man can't do justice to his work when his nerves are in a state of morbid excitement, and what with the news from home and Carmen's vagaries, I am having a pretty lively time just now. I wonder I haven't heard from my father, or that Psyche



hasn't written. Now, *she's* my idea of a true woman—full of courage and energy as any man, yet tender-hearted and devoted, and with all a woman's tact and delicacy of feeling. I wish she could come to stay here, or that I could take Carmen to her. Perhaps her influence and example might make the poor child more reasonable and companionable; or, she might be able to supply me with a key to the mystery of Carmen's behavior. Up to the present, I confess it beats me."

Thus cogitating, he bent his steps once more towards home, and when within a hundred yards of the chalet he met Madame Bouchard's victoria, drawn by a big Flemish stallion, with flowing mane and undocked tail.

In it Mademoiselle Hortense Delaforet was seated in solitary state, and catching sight of Vere she screamed in a high treble to the driver to stop, beckoning the while to Vere with her sunshade.

"I have seen your wife," she exclaimed, in a mysterious voice, as Vere approached the vehicle.

"Oh yes," he replied, not best pleased at the meeting.

"She seems a little disturbed. Not quite easy in her mind," continued Mademoiselle Hortense.

"The weather, I suppose. I hope your sisters are well."

"One moment, Monsieur Danvers. You won't be offended; but for a two months' bride, your wife seems strangely preoccupied with your handsome neighbor. She could talk of nothing else."

"Indeed! We find him very agreeable and amusing," replied Vere, coldly.

"I have known them both longer than you have. *Take care he doesn't make himself too agreeable*," she exclaimed, in a tragic whisper; then, raising her voice, "but I mustn't detain you any longer; au revoir, Monsieur Danvers. Home, coachman, if you please."

Almost before she had finished speaking, Vere had turned on his heel, just raising his hat in parting salutation.

He was more annoyed than he cared to show—at any rate, before this woman, who would ask for nothing better than to witness his discomfiture. It was not that he believed that there was one particle of foundation for the warning she had so officiously thrust upon him. He had too much faith in the depth of Carmen's affection and in the purity of her nature to entertain such a notion for a single moment. Besides which, holding the vicomte's artificial attractions in good-natured contempt, he could not conceive that, under any circumstances, such a man could become a dangerous rival.

Nevertheless, he was incensed—and, as he thought, justly so—that Mademoiselle Hortense should have dared to hint at such a possibility, and the more so because he felt sure that, having originated the notion, she would be sure not to let it lie dormant.

"She hates Carmen like poison, I know," he thought; "and she's not over-fond of me. Spiteful old cat! It's just the character Psyche gave her. She can never bear to see people happy without trying to disturb them and do them a mischief. She'll spread the report all over the place. I wish we had never seen the man!"



Vere found Carmen in a state of high glee and mirthfulness.

"Oh, Vere!" she cried, "such fun! Old Hortense has left in a furious rage. She came trying her patronizing airs over me. Told me what to do and what to avoid, as though I was still her sister's dependent at the Pension. So I just amused myself by taking her down a little."

Vere smiled grimly. "I met her outside," he said, "and she didn't strike me as being in the sweetest of tempers."

"You've no idea what a jealous, selfish creature she is. You haven't lived in the same house with her as I have. But I paid her out to-day. She'd borrowed Madame Bouchard's carriage so as to do the *grande dame* and overawe me. She'd borrow anything of anybody, and never give it back if she could help it. But you should have seen her face when I told her we had been to dinner at the château, and expected M. de Malsherbes to dine with us in a few days."

"What has she got to do with M. de Malsherbes?" asked Vere.

"Nothing; but she'd give her ears to be on such intimate terms with him as we are," cried Carmen, jubilantly.

"I'd give up my share of the intimacy for less than that—not that I value the ears of Mademoiselle Hortense, nor any part of her, very highly," he replied, dryly.

"She believes you were once in love with her, or would have been, if I hadn't come between you. But don't flatter yourself too much; she thinks that of every man she meets."

"Carmen, you are romancing."

"Not at all, I assure you. She gave me to understand that she still possessed the greatest influence over you."

"So she does: she always roughs me up the wrong way."

Carmen's eyes twinkled with delight. "Well, she's going to persuade you to break off with M. de Malsherbes; she said *persuade*, but she means *oblige*."

"And why, pray?"

"Because you are a poor, blind fool; I a vain, silly baby, if not worse, and the vicomte an ogre who is ready to devour us both, but me especially. Aren't you afraid, Vere, of the terrible prospect? Hadn't we better run away from this terrible ogre?" And the girl nestled close up to her husband's side in assumed terror.

"I wish she was a man that I could tell her to mind her own business, and kick her out of the place if she didn't," growled Vere, who had an inveterate dislike for unsolicited advice.

"I did better than that; I said I would ask your permission to invite her to meet M. de Malsherbes when he dines here."

"Bravo, Carmen, that was a good thrust!" he exclaimed, rather proud of his wife's powers of self-defence. "As you know, I don't particularly care about M. le Vicomte, but we may as well ask him to spend an evening with us before I leave for England, if it's only to show that meddlesome old woman that we don't care for her interference."

Accordingly, after dinner, Vere strolled up to the château to invite M. de Malsherbes to dine with them one evening that week.



The vicomte expressed himself delighted, and tried to detain his visitor for an hour's smoke and chat. But Vere, pleading his wife's loneliness as an excuse for his departure, did not remain long. He felt that there was so little in common between them, either as regarded thought or feeling, that the intercourse, on his side, at any rate, was bound to be constrained and formal, and Vere hated talking for talking's sake.

On his return, Carmen, who was charmed by the prospect of a little change, wrote off to invite Mademoiselle Delaforet, and either Mademoiselle Hortense or Mademoiselle Clarisse to meet M. de Malsherbes, and passed the rest of the evening in discussing the necessary arrangements for that terrible ordeal for a young house-keeper—her first dinner-party.

The next morning's mail brought Vere the anxiously-expected intelligence from Danverfield. This time it was his mother who wrote, openly and without resort to subterfuge; and the sight of her well-known handwriting on the envelope set Vere's heart beating. The contents of the old lady's long and tenderly-worded letter were such as might be expected under the circumstances. She urged him to come home without a moment's delay, and begged him to assure his wife that, although she was not included in this invitation (owing to circumstances which Psyche would explain), a mother's love was awaiting her, and that she (Mrs. Danvers) was longing to clasp her new and as yet unseen daughter in her arms, etc.

Psyche's enclosure consisted of a letter addressed to Carmen, and a few lines for Vere. These latter ran thus:

“Your father is longing to see you, and all can be better arranged when you are here. For the present he would rather you should come alone. Am writing to Carmen.

“Yours ever, PSYCHE.”

Having hitherto said nothing to his wife about the object of his journey, Vere thought it necessary, before handing her Psyche's letter, to give her a brief explanation as to how matters stood at Danverfield. Carmen listened in moody silence. She had almost forgotten that her husband intended leaving her, and now that the project was revived, she liked it even less than at first.

“Why must you go now?” she asked. “I shall feel so lonely without you.”

“Well, you see, I can't help myself. As I have told you, my father is very crotchety, and I don't want to lose the opportunity of a reconciliation while he is in the humor for it,” replied Vere.

“Take me with you, then. I can't bear to be alone. I have no friends but you,” urged the girl, piteously.

“My dear child, I wish you'd be reasonable. I tell you it is a matter of the greatest importance for both of us that I should go at once and alone, and surely you can get on without me for a few days. I'd gladly take you with me if I could, but you yourself refused to undertake the journey the other day; and now there are reasons, which this letter will explain, why you should remain.



You may be sure that I shall hurry back as soon as I can, and I hope to persuade Psyche to return with me."

Vere was picking out his cousin's letter from among a bundle of others, so did not catch the sudden glance of suspicious inquiry that flashed from Carmen's eyes at his concluding words.

"Here it is," he continued, passing it to her; "and I hope the advice of our best and stanchest friend will have more weight than mine. We shall never be able to repay her for all she has done for us."

"How so?" asked Carmen, sharply.

"Why, my dear girl, how can you ask? Hasn't she stuck up for me through thick and thin? Didn't she make your life happier for you at the Pension? Do I not owe it to her that you are my wife? And now, to crown all, she's going to restore me to my family; for I swear it's her doing—every inch of it. Nobody else has the slightest influence with my father. You don't know how she's toiled, and schemed, and persevered in spite of every discouragement," said Vere, in a tone of deep feeling.

"If you love her so much, why didn't you ask *her* to be your wife instead of me?" cried Carmen, almost fiercely.

Vere gazed at her in blank astonishment. "Carmen, I'm ashamed of you—I didn't think you could be such a baby!" he said, in high displeasure.

"I'm not baby enough to like to hear you exalt another woman before me like that," she hissed out from between her set teeth.

"Oh, very well, we won't discuss it further, since it pleases you to be so insanely jealous."

"Is *she* going to be there?" asked the girl, after a long pause.

"Certainly."

"Then I forbid you to go alone."

"Nonsense, Carmen! You don't know what you are talking about. It is not for you to say what I am to do," said Vere, sternly. He had never before been really angry with her; but this was beyond the limits of his forbearance, and she must be made to understand that he was master of his own actions. "Now, listen," he continued—"I had intended remaining until after the dinner on Friday; but since you are so unreasonable, I shall start for England to-morrow, and we must defer our party until I return. I shall leave you now to think over your behavior; and I am sure you will come to see that you are in the wrong, and enable me to forgive you before I go." Upon which he quitted the room without waiting for Carmen's response.

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#### CHAPTER XIV.

"Some hidden principle to move,  
To put together, part and prove,  
And mete the bounds of hate and love."

TENNYSON.

LEFT to herself, Carmen burst into a paroxysm of tears, not of regret, but of fierce, uncontrollable passion.



Presently her eyes lighted on Psyche's letter, which Vere had left for her on the table. She pounced on it like a tigress upon her prey, and, without stopping to read, tore it, with teeth and fingers, into a hundred fragments.

"I hate her, I hate her!" she almost shrieked. "Do you hear me, Vere? I hate your paragon of perfection! I should like to treat her like this letter!" and she ground the inoffensive paper under her little foot.

Presently the door was gently opened, and Louise entered the room.

"Did madame call?" she asked, softly.

Carmen glared at her, pushing back her dishevelled hair. "What do you want? Have you come to mock me? Take care, I am dangerous."

"Hélas! no, dear madame. I only came to see if I could be of any service to madame in her trouble."

"What do you know of my trouble?" asked Carmen, fiercely.

"I guess it from what I have suffered myself. *My* husband was a brute, and ill-treated me."

"How dare you suggest such a thing? It's false; he loves me. It's all *her* fault."

"Yes, there's always a *her* at the bottom of it. But I spoiled the beauty of *mine*," said the woman, with grim ferocity.

"Tell me, what did you do?" cried Carmen, eagerly.

"Not now; some other time, if madame wishes. Jacques nearly killed me for it; but at least I was revenged, and then I left him."

"My husband is leaving me. Oh, I cannot let him go. Louise, send him to me at once."

"Monsieur has gone out towards the town. He will come back soon, never fear," said the woman, soothingly.

"But he's going away to-morrow to England—to her."

"If I might venture to advise madame, she will hide her tears, and treat the matter lightly. Men are like that. If they think you cannot do without them, they go; but persuade them that you do not want them, and they remain."

"My husband is not like other men," exclaimed Carmen, proudly.

"Pardon, madame, but I think differently. I have kept my eyes open since I have been here. Madame has been too kind, too tender, and monsieur has thought lightly of her in consequence. I know the way of husbands."

"What shall I do, then? Tell me, Louise, quick! You who know."

"I can only say what I think; what my love for madame makes me suggest. If I were madame I should command him once more not to leave me; and if he persisted, I should say, 'Very well, so much the worse for you.'"

"And then, if he went?" cried the girl, breathlessly.

"And then— Well, I should take steps to console myself in his absence; and, who knows, perhaps punish him."

"But how?"



"That I must leave to madame," replied the woman, with an acid smile. "Madame has cause for jealousy. Could not monsieur be made to feel the same torments? There is a gentleman not far from here who adores madame."

"Louise, what do you mean?" asked Carmen, shrinking under the woman's crafty gaze. In her mad passion she had forgotten her dignity, her self-respect; and now it was evident that she had lost both in the eyes of her dependent.

Louise was quick to remark the revulsion of feeling, and dreading the consequences if the girl saw fit to confide in her husband, humbly made reply, "Madame must remember that I spoke at her own request; I merely put myself in her place, and said what *I* should do."

"Leave me now, I am tired—I want to think," said Carmen, wearily; and the maid silently stole out of the room with a backward glance, half anxious, half malicious.

Meanwhile Vere, having written an apologetic note to M. de Malsherbes asking him to postpone his visit, started for Boisy-la-Reine, intending to post it there, and then to call upon and consult with his good friend Mademoiselle Delaforet.

Although habitually easy-going and good-tempered, this final outburst of infantile jealousy, following close on his irritating interview with Mademoiselle Hortense and the preceding scene with his wife, had completely upset his equanimity. As he strode away along the dusty incline that led towards the town, he communed bitterly with himself on the new and uncomfortable phase in his relations towards Carmen which this last display of ill-governed temper inaugurated. "I could forgive anything but ingratitude and indelicacy," he thought. "But we have come to a pretty pass when my own wife dares to make such an accusation to my face, and without the slightest foundation. Something must be done to put a stop to this sort of thing, or life will become a burden to both of us. Yes, the best thing I can do is to carry out my threat and start to-morrow; perhaps a little solitary reflection may bring her to her senses. Anyhow, I must put my foot down now, once and for always, or neither of us will ever have an hour's peace."

Arrived at Boisy-la-Reine, he went straight to the Pension, and was much disgusted to find that Mademoiselle Delaforet had gone out, and was not expected back until the evening.

Vere reflected that if he returned home to dinner, it would be almost too late for him to come back to town again that night; and, as it was essential that he should see the old lady before he started, and try to make some arrangement to lessen his wife's loneliness during his absence, he decided to dine at the Aigle Noir, and to call again on Mademoiselle Delaforet later in the evening.

In adopting this course he felt some compunction on Carmen's account, but he could see no other alternative, and thought, besides, that by leaving her to partake of the evening meal alone, he would better mark a sense of his displeasure at her outrageous conduct.

Madame Bouchard welcomed him with every demonstration of delight and surprise.



"Ah, Monsieur Danvers! so you are giving yourself a holiday from the nest. Ah, well! after two months' constant billing and cooing, I think you deserve it. It doesn't do for a man to be always tied to his wife's apron-strings. But what does madame say?"

Vere explained briefly that his visit was unexpected and compulsory, owing to a sudden call to England.

"Mon Dieu! She will be inconsolable—your little wife. But we will look after her during your absence. Apropos, Mademoiselle Hortense drove in my carriage to visit her to-day, and she brings back quite a history about M. de Malsherbes and his intimacy with you—and *your wife!* But one must not believe all that that amiable creature says; she is so romantic, and perhaps a little fond of scandal. There is nothing in it, of course. Naturally M. le Vicomte would be charmed to cultivate the intimacy of such agreeable neighbors; while his elegant admiration would amuse and flatter a young and unsophisticated creature like your beautiful 'bride.'"

Vere had hard work to restrain an outspoken expression of his opinion on Mademoiselle Hortense's cackling propensities, but dreading to give thereby further foothold to the incipient scandal, he turned the conversation with some casual remark, and shortly afterwards took his leave, having ordered a vehicle for the morning to convey him to the station.

He found on reaching the Pension that Mademoiselle Mathilde had not yet returned, although it was now getting late. Having delayed so long, he did not care to go away without seeing her, so accepted the invitation of Mademoiselle Clarisse to await her arrival, and entered the house.

The state parlor into which he was ushered recalled the memory of his first interview with Carmen, and the still later one, when, after plighting their troth, they indulged in ecstatic anticipations of a happy future. How far away that seemed! But not so far as the happiness to which they had then looked forward without hesitation or doubt.

Nine o'clock struck, then the half-hour, and Mademoiselle Clarisse, who had retired to superintend the dismissal of the pupils to their dormitories, re-entered with many apologies for her sister's prolonged absence. "She has gone over to see Madame Goodchaux at M——," she explained, "and must have missed her train or have been persuaded to remain for dinner."

At last, just as Vere had decided to wait no longer, a cab drew up at the door, and Mademoiselle Delaforet entered the room.

"You here, Monsieur Danvers—and at this hour! I am so sorry to have kept you waiting," she exclaimed, throwing off her mantle and bonnet. "And now we will not waste time in needless explanations, as I know you must be anxious to return home. But tell me at once what I can do for you."

"I have to start for England early to-morrow morning," Vere began. "And as, for various reasons, my wife is unable to accompany me, I am come to ask you if, during my short absence, you would



kindly consent to spend a few days at Beaurivage, so that she may not be left quite alone."

The old lady pondered a moment, then replied, regretfully, "I do not see how I can quit my little flock during term-time."

"But surely, for a few days, your sisters—"

"Poor Hortense, you know she doesn't count. She has her own private troubles to occupy her mind. To be sure, there's Clarisse, a capital worker—my right hand, I call her—but she is rather young to have the whole responsibility of an establishment like this on her shoulders. Young girls are curious animals to drive, though perhaps you have discovered that for yourself by now," said Mademoiselle Mathilde, with a kindly chuckle, more than half expecting Vere to break out in an ardent defence of the genus *jeune fille*.

But he was intent on accomplishing the object of his visit, besides being in no mood for badinage. So he only grimaced a smile, and returned to the attack. "Do you think you could spare Mademoiselle Clarisse? It will not be for long—a week or ten days at the utmost. I shall regard it as a great favor."

"Oh, she would enjoy it above all things, and so should I, for the matter of that. But we cannot always do what we like in this world. Stay, I have the best solution. Why should not Carmen come and stay with us? We shall be delighted, and it will be a little novelty for her to return to school after such a long holiday."

"You are very kind. I'm really ashamed to give you so much trouble," replied Vere. "May I leave it an open question, that if you really cannot manage to get away, or to spare your sister, Carmen shall come to you?"

"Certainly. I will consult with Clarisse, and arrange either to write or see the dear child to-morrow. It will be quite a *fête* to have her among us again," exclaimed Mademoiselle Delaforet, joyfully.

"Thank you very much. I will tell Carmen to be prepared for either alternative," said Vere, rising to take leave. "By-the-way, I forgot to mention that our little dinner-party will have to be postponed till my return."

"Cela va sans dire! If it is not an impertinent question, is not your departure unexpectedly sudden?" asked the old lady.

Vere hesitated whether or no to confide to her the reasons that had induced him to alter his plans, but not liking to make too much of his domestic troubles, he decided to keep his own counsel. After all, perhaps, it was only a passing cloud, and might blow over, and then he would be sorry if he had exposed his wife's weaknesses even to so trusted a friend as Mademoiselle Delaforet.

"It is somewhat sudden," he replied, pressing the old lady's hand. "My father, from whom, as you know, I have been estranged for many years, is desirous of seeing me. And you will understand my anxiety to lose no time in effecting a reconciliation for my wife's sake as well as my own, and, above all, for the sake of my poor mother, whose unworthy favorite I am."

"Poor woman! how she must have suffered!" cried Mademoiselle Mathilde, with tears in her eyes. "Well, I must not detain you



longer, or Carmen will become anxious. Poor child, it is rather a trial for her to lose you so soon. Au revoir, Monsieur Danvers; I wish you a safe and pleasant journey."

Vere looked at his watch as he left the house, to find it was nearly eleven, and, although he strode along as fast as his legs would carry him, it was close on midnight when he arrived at home.

A light was burning in the salon, and he hoped for a moment that his wife was sitting up for him, ready to accept the forgiveness which he was so anxious to accord. His anger had evaporated a good deal in the course of the evening, and although he was still determined to make her retract her words and acknowledge the injustice of her suspicions, he was prepared to exact the lightest possible atonement, and to let absolution follow immediately on confession.

His latch-key gave him admittance to the hall, and on opening the door of the sitting-room, he was disappointed on finding it tenantless. "Poor child, she was worn out, I suppose, and has retired to rest. I hope, though, she isn't asleep, for I sha'n't have much time in the morning. I must start at 8.30, and there's my packing to do yet." Thus musing, he directed his steps to his wife's room. What was his surprise, on turning the handle, after softly knocking, to find the door locked! He knocked again once or twice, and was on the point of calling out to waken her, when Louise appeared in the passage, lamp in hand.

"Madame asked me to beg you not to disturb her. She has a bad headache, and thought she would like to rest quietly," she said, in a low voice.

"Well, but I want to see her to-night. I shall have no time in the morning. How long has she been up-stairs?" asked Vere, impatiently.

"For some hours. She waited dinner till it was all spoiled, and then her head became so bad that she could not eat, and I persuaded her to take a cup of tea and retire to rest—monsieur being so uncertain in his hours of entry," she replied, with a malicious intonation which escaped Vere's notice in the perplexity of the moment.

"I was detained in Boisy-la-Reine," he began—then checked himself. Why should he stoop to exculpate himself to his servant?

The woman glanced sharply at him out of the corners of her eyes, then said "*Indeed!*" and paused, an incredulous smile hovering about her thin lips.

"I can sleep in the spare room," said Vere, after a moment's reflection. "I shall want my coffee at six o'clock to-morrow morning, and you can call madame at the same time. I have to start at eight. You need not wait; I don't require anything more."

"Bon repos, mon beau monsieur," muttered Louise, beneath her breath, as she withdrew. "I wish you pleasant dreams and a glad awakening; but, if madame follows my advice, you won't have much stomach for your journey."

Tired as he was, Vere did not get much real sleep until daylight began to show through the blinds, and then he fell into a sound, un-



conscious slumber, from which he awoke with a start on hearing the servant at his door.

Looking lazily at his watch, he found that it was already seven o'clock.

"That confounded woman overslept herself, I suppose," he muttered, as he hurriedly performed his toilet. "I shall have no end of a rush to get my things packed and ready by the time the vehicle arrives."

Presently he rang his bell, and when Louise appeared with his coffee and toast, he interrupted her excuses to bid her take his port-manteau into his wife's room, and to put out his clothes ready for packing.

"Is monsieur going, after all, to-day?" asked the woman, with some slight show of surprise. "I was afraid it would be too late."

"Of course I am," he replied. "Tell your mistress I will come in to see her in about five minutes; but I am very pressed for time, owing to your stupidity. How is she this morning?"

"As well as can be expected; but she does not think monsieur is going."

"Nonsense; she knows that I must. Now see about my things at once. Mind, I only want them put ready. I will pack them myself; there's no trusting you women. I don't want to take my whole wardrobe; I sha'n't be away more than a week."

"Oh, monsieur is coming back so soon! A la bonne heure," said Louise as she withdrew, adding to herself, when she was out of hearing, "We shall see; but I don't believe it."

As soon as he was dressed, Vere hurried into Carmen's room. He found her seated at her dressing-table in her *peignoir*, gazing mournfully at her own reflection in the looking-glass, while Louise was bustling about opening drawers and cupboards, and arranging his garments in neat little piles on the bed.

As he advanced towards her he could see in the glass that Carmen started and changed color; but she showed no signs of rising, nor did she return his greeting.

"Louise, you can go; I will finish them myself," said Vere; and then, as soon as they were alone, he advanced to his wife's side.

"Come, Carmen, do not let us part in anger," he said; "I am sorry I was so late last night, but I had to see Mademoiselle Delaforet about staying with you during my absence, and, as ill-luck would have it, she was out and kept me waiting till past ten o'clock."

The girl, whose eyes were heavy and dark-rimmed, as though from much weeping, merely averted her head and kept silent.

"Carmen, my dear child, surely you must see that it is your place to ask my forgiveness for your cruel and unjust accusation of yesterday. But look! rather than perpetuate this miserable quarrel, I will set you the example, and ask your pardon if, in the heat of anger, I said more than I ought," he cried, tenderly taking her cold little hand and pressing it to his lips.

A faint shiver passed through the girl's frame. She raised her



bloodshot eyes to his face with a look of mingled incredulity and hope, and for a moment seemed as though she was about to fall weeping into his arms.

In spite of his previous resolves and the pressing necessity for his presence at Danverfield, Vere would willingly have sacrificed both *amour propre* and convenience for the sake of breaking through this icy coldness, which was an entirely new phase in his wife's character, and as painful to him as it was strange.

He was about to appeal once more to her better feelings, when Louise's harsh voice was heard outside. She was singing lustily,

“Malbrouck s'en va-t-en guerre,  
Miranton, miranton, mirantaine;  
Malbrouck s'en va-t-en guerre,  
Dieu sait quand il reviendra.”

Both Carmen and Vere were startled by this unusual outburst, and the latter was possessed with a strong inclination to open the door, and fling a boot or some other handy missile at the untimely songstress's head. Nor was his wrath diminished when, on looking again into his wife's eyes, he perceived that the love-light had died out of them, giving place once more to cold distrust and suspicion.

“If you mean what you say,” she said at last, in a voice that seemed to have caught the harsh tones from outside—“if you mean what you say, prove your sincerity by abandoning this journey.”

“Carmen, how can I? You know what hangs upon it. Besides, do you think that I have no love for my mother and father—my poor mother who has been longing to see me all these years?”

“Then, let me go with you,” cried the girl, turning on him with an imploring gesture.

“You know I cannot do that now; Psyche told you why in her letter. But another time you shall certainly do so. In fact, I hope soon we shall be able to make our home in England, and live near my parents.”

“You won't do anything to please me,” she said, sullenly.

“I will do anything in reason. I will postpone my departure till to-morrow, or even for two or three days, if you will only withdraw what you said yesterday.”

“I cannot do that while you lead me to think it is true.”

“My poor child! you are trying your best to wreck my happiness—and your own,” said Vere, sadly. “For Heaven's sake, consider what you are doing.”

“I have considered,” she replied, in a hollow voice. “Either you love me, or you do not. If you love me, you stay. If you go—I know what to believe.”

“Carmen, this is simple madness! I cannot stoop to argue the point with you. I could not stay even if I wished after what you have said, for to do so would be to allow that your suspicions are not without foundation. I can only pray that in my absence you will think over all that has happened, and learn to take a juster



view of my conduct. I believe you love me, and should no more dream of doubting your honor than my own. Try if you cannot cultivate the same trust in me that I have in you."

Carmen, who had flashed back sullen defiance to his indignant disclaimer, seemed moved by the gentle earnestness with which he concluded his appeal. Again the yearning look came into her eyes. Again, in her quivering features, he could plainly read the fierce internecine conflict between "Faith and Unfaith." Surely, with love for an ally, the former must win. And Vere advanced his hand to draw her to him.

"Pardon, monsieur; the carriage has arrived for the station," said Louise, entering the room. "Bon Dieu! Monsieur's portmanteau is not yet packed. Then monsieur is not going to-day?"

At critical moments in our life a very small matter often suffices to turn the balance. A word, a look, a gesture may upset our equilibrium and entail the most momentous consequences.

So now, an indefinable something in the woman's manner, a suspicion of malicious triumph in her voice—so vague, that it gave him no handle for open reproof—roused Vere to a sense that his dignity and marital authority were at stake. It flashed across his mind that Louise had been counselling insubordination.

Instantly his determination was set not to depart from his word. Carmen must own her fault and ask his forgiveness, or he would not postpone his journey by a single hour.

He turned to his wife, intercepting, as he fancied, a look of intelligence between her and her maid. "It is for you to decide—shall I go or stay?" Unconsciously his tone betrayed his irritation and dispelled the charm of his previous tenderness.

"Stay!" cried the girl, with a passionate fervor that made it sound almost like a command.

"You know the conditions," he said, shortly.

Carmen hesitated, and glanced appealingly at Louise, who pressed her thin lips into a cynical smile, and declined to take the hint to leave them alone.

Vere half divined the situation, but determined not to help her. Carmen had chosen to make this woman her confidante; let her make her submission in her presence.

"Well?" he asked, beginning to throw some of his clothes into the open portmanteau, more to conceal his anxiety than as a form of coercion.

Unhappily, Carmen construed it in the latter sense.

"You can please yourself," she said, hoarsely.

"Then kindly help me to pack my bag, or I shall lose the train," replied Vere, with affected calmness, continuing the operation.

The girl made a movement as though to fling herself on her knees beside him, but restrained herself and dashed violently out of the room.

Ten minutes later Vere sought her to say a few parting words. But Carmen had locked herself in the salon, and, as she remained deaf to his last appeal, he drove away sad at heart, without one con-



ciliatory word or token of affection from the wife who so lately had vowed him her life-long fealty and devotion.

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## CHAPTER XV.

"The world hath its delights,  
And its delusions too;  
But Home to calmer bliss invites,  
More tranquil and more true."

JOHN BOWRING.

AT eight o'clock on the morning following his departure from Boisy-la-Reine Vere found himself at the railway-station of the little country town nearest to Danverfield.

Stiff in every limb, and chilled to the bone after twenty-four hours of almost continuous travelling, he staggered out on to the platform and hailed the only porter visible, in whom he recognized an old acquaintance.

"Good-morning, Hodges. Glad to see you're still to the fore. Just bring my luggage across to the other side, will you? I suppose you don't happen to know whether my father has sent the carriage for me?"

"Lor' bless my soul, it's Master Vere," exclaimed the old man, touching his cap in friendly recognition. "Glad to see you again, sir; it's a tidyish time since you've been in these parts."

"Yes, Hodges, getting on for four years. And how's the world been using you?"

"Pretty much in the old style, sir. The loikes of us don't get much variation in our perfession. Yer see it's trains all day long, from morning till night, and trains *is* trains all the world over. Sharpish frost last night, sir; I doubt yer found it main cold travelling."

"Yes, I was none too warm. Now, what about this trap? I wired them from Paris to say I should arrive this morning, so I suppose they will have sent to meet me."

"The carriage is outside, sir; I saw it drive up just before the down train were due. It were over yesterday, too, to meet the doctor from Lun'on. Maybe you've heard of the squire's mishap?"

"No; what has happened?" inquired Vere, anxiously.

"Th' ole gentleman's had a bad fall from his horse, and they du say as how he's main bad."

"Good gracious! Why didn't you tell me at once? Come, bring my things along; I mustn't waste any more time," exclaimed Vere, hurrying through the ticket-office and out into the road, where he found Charlie waiting for him in the dog-cart.

"Here you are, old man—I'm jolly glad you've come," cried his cousin, shaking him warmly by the hand; "though I'm sorry to be the bearer of rather bad news."

"I've just heard something about it," replied Vere, settling himself in the cart. "How did it happen? Is it really serious?"



"I'm afraid so. The squire was out with the hounds on Tuesday, riding a young horse, and came to grief over a gate. He was pitched on to his head, and we had to take him home in a cart—senseless. Your telegram arrived yesterday, just as we were going to wire to you to come over at once," said Charlie, as he gathered up the reins and started the mare at a quick trot.

"Any bones broken?" asked Vere, after a moment's pause.

"No; at least, the doctor thinks not. But he's suffering from a slight concussion of the brain, and hasn't quite recovered his senses yet."

"By Jove, I am sorry! I suppose he won't know me now I've come?"

Charlie shook his head doubtfully. "He has to be kept awfully quiet, and I haven't seen him myself since the accident. He won't have any one near him but Psyche, and she says he keeps mentioning your name in his ramblings."

"Poor old dad!" exclaimed Vere, gently; and then, after a few more questions, he relapsed into a mournful silence which lasted almost unbroken until they reached the well-known lodge gates, and drove up to the home of his childhood.

Mrs. Danvers, who had evidently been on the lookout for them, appeared at the door, pale and trembling with mingled excitement and anxiety; but as she folded her long-absent son in her arms, the mother's joy momentarily obliterated all other griefs, and found vent in a few silent tears of delight and thankfulness.

"Vere, my boy; home at last," were the only words she could find voice to utter; but the avidity with which she returned his embraces, and her looks of mingled pride and joy, told more eloquently than any set phrases of undiminished love and tender solicitude.

"Come, dear mother, let me take you in-doors. It's too cold for you to stay out here," said Vere, gently leading the old lady, alternately smiling and weeping, into the hall. Here he was warmly greeted by his sisters and Captain Compton, who had considerably kept themselves in the background until Mrs. Danvers had had her say.

"Where's Psyche?" asked Vere, remarking the absence of her whom, next his mother, he had most looked forward to meeting.

"She's up-stairs with poor father," replied his sister Mary. "I'll let her know you're here presently. But you must be starving; come in and have some breakfast, and you can do your talking afterwards."

"Yes, poor boy, he looks quite perished with cold and hunger," cried his mother, leading the way to the breakfast-room, where she jealously monopolized the right of attending to his wants.

Apart from the discomforts of travel, Vere's mind had been so fully occupied with anxious speculations as to what manner of reception awaited him at home, and with still more perturbed reflections on the painful scene with Carmen which preceded his departure, that sleep had not visited his eyes during the night journey from London. Consequently, when he had satisfied the cravings of hun-



ger, he did not require much persuasion to induce him to adopt his mother's suggestion that he should try to snatch an hour's rest in his room pending the arrival of the doctor, without whose express sanction none but Mrs. Danvers and Psyche were allowed to visit the invalid.

It seemed almost like a dream to Vere, this being once more under the paternal roof, and as he dozed off, his last coherent impression was that he should probably wake to find himself in his bedroom at Beaurivage.

But the force of old associations is lasting. And when by-and-by he opened his eyes and discovered his mother standing by his side in a state of tearful gladness, his hold on his actual surroundings became assured, while the incidents of the past four years seemed to be wrapped in the haze of unreality.

"Doctor Metcalf has just left, and I thought, dear, you would like to hear his report; although I am sorry now to have disturbed you out of such a beautiful sound sleep," began Mrs. Danvers.

"Have I slept long? What time is it, mother?" asked Vere, sitting up and rubbing his eyes.

"Close upon one o'clock."

"By Jove! So late? I'm glad you roused me. Can I see my father?"

The old lady shook her head. "Not to-day, the doctor says. He's afraid of any excitement just at present, although, on the whole, he thinks there is a slight improvement in your poor father's condition."

"Well, I'll come down anyway. I suppose you adhere to the old dinner-hour?"

"Yes, two o'clock. You'll find Psyche down-stairs. I'm just going up to relieve guard. I don't know what we should have done without that dear girl. She can manage her uncle better than any of us."

"She's a regular trump," cried Vere, "and nobody has more cause to say so than I have. I'll just make myself tidy, and be down in a few minutes."

Mrs. Danvers pressed a loving kiss on her son's brow, and left him to arrange his toilet.

As he descended the stairs Vere heard a light foot-fall behind him, and, turning round, beheld Psyche, who had just emerged from her uncle's room.

"My dear girl, is it you? I'm so glad to see you," he cried, clasping both her hands in his—"let me have a good look at my guardian angel. *Ma parole*, how you have altered!"

"I've grown older, I suppose, and so have you, Vere," replied the girl, dropping her eyes under his searching gaze.

"I didn't mean that. More beautiful, I meant to say—only I know you don't like compliments—though this is nothing but the plain truth. What a time it is since we have met—and what a lot of things I have to say to you: and first of all," continued Vere in a tone of deep feeling, "that you're the best and truest friend that



ever man had. I'm no sort of hand at expressing my feelings in words, but you'll believe me when I say that I thank you for all you have done for me from the bottom of my heart."

"Please don't, Vere—I'd rather you wouldn't," murmured Psyche, a deep blush spreading slowly over her face; "I've done no more for you than any one else would have done under the same circumstances."

"That's nonsense, Psyche," exclaimed Vere, wondering at her confusion; "still, if, like the modest violet, you prefer to let your virtues bloom unnoticed, I'll respect your wishes; but my sentiments remain the same, and nothing will ever change them."

"How did you leave Carmen?" asked the girl, recovering her self-possession.

It was Vere's turn to feel discomposed as the recollection of their stormy parting flashed across his mind, and the impossibility of confiding to his cousin that she was the direct cause of it. "Oh, she's all right as far as bodily health goes, but was suffering from a little pain in her temper when I left," he said, striving to speak lightly.

"Poor child! Is she still as impetuous as ever? I hope that, under the influence of your—under your influence, she would have calmed down into a staid and sober matron."

"She's a long way off that, I'm afraid; but I say, Psyche, if you could manage to come and stay with us, it would do her all the good in the world. An ounce of good example is worth a hundred-weight of precepts, and I should like it too, awfully."

"I'm afraid I can't do that at present," she replied, hurriedly. "There's your father to nurse—and then they'll want me at home."

"Well, we will talk about it later on, but I don't mean to let you off. I regard you as in some sense responsible for our wedded happiness, as we are both your protégés," said Vere, gayly. "You see, this comes of being so unselfish and good-natured—you're bound to be imposed upon."

"We'd better go down, they'll be waiting dinner for us," said the girl, avoiding a direct reply and leading the way to the dining-room.

In the course of the afternoon Vere was naturally subjected to a minute cross-examination as to his proceedings during his term of banishment, and his sisters expressed the utmost curiosity with regard to Carmen.

"I can't imagine you a married man, Vere," said Mrs. Compton, laughing; "I always thought you were cut out for an old bachelor. How did it come to pass? Did she ask you?"

"You've gone through it yourself, and ought to know," replied Vere. "Did you ask Compton? It sounds suspiciously as if you did."

"Of course she did, my boy! At least she asked me to ask her—didn't you, Bessie?" said the captain, maliciously.

"Don't be so silly, Horace—as if any one in their senses would trouble to run after such as *you*. You worried me to death with



your entreaties, and I said yes just for the sake of peace and quietude," replied his wife, with assumed asperity. "But really, Vere, it must have been rather a trial making love in a foreign tongue."

"My dear child, the language of love is the language of the heart and eyes, and is common to all nationalities," remarked the captain, sententiously. "I remember when I was quartered at Valetta making violent love to a pretty little Maltese girl, and we got on famously, although I couldn't speak a word of her lingo. Ah me! What eyes those southern women have!"

"I say, Vere, you'll have to be careful how you bring your bride into the neighborhood of this Don Juan," chimed in Charlie; "he's utterly shameless—boasting of his conquests before his wife."

"Oh, there's no danger. Horace is like the lustrous eyes of the southern beauties about whom he raves—he says a great deal more than he means," said Mrs. Compton, with a reproving glance at her irrepressible husband. In reality they were a most devoted couple, and fondly attached to each other; but they frequently indulged in these little public sparring matches, which amused without deceiving any one.

"I am quite looking forward to making Carmen's acquaintance," remarked Mary Danvers to her brother: "she must be very beautiful, from what Psyche says."

"I hope to bring her over in the spring if the old gentleman can be induced to overlook the fact of her being a foreigner. But you'll have to rub up your French against her visit. She is such a lazy child. I have not been able to persuade her to learn to speak English properly," replied Vere.

"Father won't understand her, then, nor mother."

"I shall have to devote my mind to a serious course of tuition on my return. But I want to persuade Psyche to go back with me and relieve me of my task. By-the-way, what time does the post go out? I ought to send Carmen a line to acquaint her of my safe arrival."

"You're too late to-day. Letters for the night mails have to be posted before noon."

"I'll write to her all the same, and get it off my conscience," said Vere.

Accordingly, after taking a stroll round the estate, in company with his brother-in-law and cousin, he left his companions in the stables busily engaged discussing the merits of the various steeds, and retired to the morning-room to indite his letter to his wife.

The events of the last twenty-four hours had tended to dwarf the significance of what had seemed to him at the time a very serious disagreement. And although, when he recalled the mutinous obstinacy with which Carmen had repulsed his advances towards a reconciliation, a pang of anxious misgiving shot through his heart, he still hoped that, on reflection, she must have perceived the groundlessness of her jealousy, and would by now be only desirous of owning her fault and obtaining his forgiveness.

"I can't imagine what can have put such an idea into the child's



head," he thought. And this reflection led him to a closer analysis of his own sentiments towards his favorite cousin than he had ever yet seemed fit to attempt.

The idea of being in love with Psyche, in the sense of wishing to make her his wife, had never before entered his brain. They had known one another so long, had always been such fast friends and intimate allies, and more particularly since the time of his banishment from home, Psyche had assumed so completely the character of a devoted sister—that he had never dreamed of regarding her in any other light than that of a good angel to whom Providence had assigned the care of his well-being. Of course he loved her with a love that was the outcome of heartfelt gratitude and an admiration bordering on veneration for all her noble qualities. She had always been his ideal of what perfection in the opposite sex might mean. He could imagine no happier method of passing through life than with such a friend and companion always at his side. And when he came to ask himself how it was that, entertaining these beliefs as part of his religion, he had never attempted to rouse within himself or cultivate in her the knowledge that her love was a necessity to his complete happiness, he was quite at a loss for a satisfactory answer.

"I suppose we were too intimate at first, and too completely separated latterly. Then, too, she never could have cared for me in that way. So, perhaps, it's as well as it is; but the man who succeeds in gaining her love and winning her for his wife will be a lucky fellow." With this reflection, he dismissed the train of thought which he had been following up with an almost involuntary assiduity, and addressed himself to the less pleasing duty before him.

Fault-finding and scolding comes naturally to some people; but Vere was not one of these. When he was angered, he was at no pains to conceal his displeasure; but he was incapable of nursing his wrath, and of dealing it out in small doses over an unlimited period. Yet, in this case, he felt that, to condone the offence before the culprit showed some outward signs of contrition, would be to lay himself open to future attacks of the same unpleasant description. The secret mistrust of his honor and affection that Carmen evinced, had opened his eyes to the folly of the act which he had committed in marrying a girl whose disposition and ways of thought were so entirely discordant with his own. His heart sank within him when he contemplated a life-long existence passed in an atmosphere of mutual suspicion and dislike, for how could his affection withstand many attacks of the kind? while her love for him must have sunk to its lowest ebb before she could have brought herself to think so badly of him, much less to confess it. Then, as he mourned over his lost happiness—the memory of his wife's winning graces, and the thousand little ways and looks and sayings indicative of the deepest attachment, with which up to the very minute of her outbreak she had charmed his imagination, rose before him. Surely these, and the more formal protestations of undying love which she was ever ready to lavish upon him in her softer moods, could not



have been assumed? Rather, let him conclude that the offensive words were the outcome of a fit of childish petulance—words of which she scarcely understood the full import when she uttered them, and for which her sense of feminine dignity alone prevented her from offering immediate reparation.

Vere readily adopted the consolation which this theory carried with it. Perhaps he was to blame for judging her too harshly, and expecting too much, and too speedy an assimilation to his own particular ways of life and thought. He must have patience, he must give her time; and if she loved him, as he believed she did, all might yet be well.

Accordingly, he penned her a little friendly note, acquainting her with the details of his journey and his father's sad condition, and carefully avoiding all reference to the subject of their dispute, and concluding thus:

"I'm afraid you won't get this till Saturday morning, as I was too tired to think about writing when I first came in, and stupidly missed the post; but I am sending you a telegram to announce my safe arrival, so you will have had no cause for anxiety. I hardly know how my father's illness will turn, or how long I may be obliged to stay. You will readily understand that, being here, I cannot leave till the old gentleman is out of danger and I have fulfilled the object of my visit. Be assured that I will return as soon as possible. Remember me kindly to Mademoiselle Delaforet, who I presume is with you now—unless you have decided to pay her a visit at the Pension. I think I would advise the latter course—if you have not already adopted it—in view of my prolonged absence. You will find it less dull than at Beaurivage.

"Ever your loving husband,

"VERE DANVERS."

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## CHAPTER XVI.

"She never told her love,  
But let concealment, like a worm i' the bud,  
Feed on her damask cheek."—SHAKESPEARE.

ONE day succeeded another, and still Mr. Danvers lay in a semi-unconscious condition. But although his mental powers remained dormant, he was making satisfactory progress in other respects. In spite of his advanced age, his vigorous constitution, and the reserve of strength engendered by a life passed in active and healthful pursuits helped to minimize the effects of a mischance which must have proved fatal to a more delicate organism.

The medical men were agreed that, so long as he could be kept quiet and free from excitement, there was no immediate danger to be apprehended. Nevertheless, as they added significantly, it would not be prudent to "halloo until they were out of the wood."

This verdict, while relieving Vere of his first acute anxiety, natu-



rally kept him in a state of uncertainty as to his future plans and movements.

Although life at Danverfield was necessarily quiet and uneventful, it formed an agreeable contrast to the turmoil and bustle of the previous week, and made the enforced prolongation of his absence from Carmen less irksome than perhaps it should have been, from a marital point of view.

Carmen had not replied to his letter; but that did not cause him any particular uneasiness. She was always a bad correspondent, and in all probability was still brooding over her imaginary wrongs, and debating in her own mind whether to surrender unconditionally or to stand upon her dignity a little longer. Half an hour's coaxing and a few peace-offerings (which he would take back with him) would restore the pretty, wayward child to her wonted good-temper.

A subject of more anxious thought was the growing suspicion that he had inadvertently given Psyche some cause for offence.

Unquestionably she was avoiding him, and he determined to find out the reason of her altered demeanor.

At last, after an infinity of trouble—for, without openly appearing to shun him, the girl managed to occupy all her time with her self-imposed duties—Vere succeeded in catching her alone.

"Can't you spare me a few moments, Psyche?" he asked, as his cousin entered the library, where he was sitting, and, having secured a book, was about to retire.

"Certainly, if you like, although I can't stop long; uncle may want me," she replied, pausing irresolutely.

"Mother has just gone up to him," said Vere, determined not to be put off, and endeavoring vainly to draw her into a confidential chat, such as they used to enjoy in former days. Then, for the first time, he realized how completely she had lost her old frank openness of speech and manner. Her evident constraint reacted upon himself, and he sought refuge in generalities.

"Do you think my father will be able to see me soon—say within the next day or two?" he inquired. "You see, time is running on, and I really ought to return to Beaurivage. I told Carmen I should not be absent more than a week, and it is already ten days since I left."

"I hardly know what to say," replied the girl. "Uncle seemed much better yesterday, and he slept fairly well all night. The doctor says he may be considered quite out of danger now; but when I mentioned your anxiety to see him, he said that he dare not sanction it on his own responsibility, as the least excitement might bring on a relapse."

"What's to be done, then? I can't stay on here forever," said Vere, gloomily. "Carmen will be taking it into her head that I never mean to return."

"But, surely, if you write and tell her how you are placed—"

"I have written, and she has not deigned to reply. I can't think what has come to her, though I suppose she is all right, as she is with Mademoiselle Delaforet."



"Shall I write to Mademoiselle Mathilde?"

"I won't trouble you. I'll do it myself to-day. It's not a bad notion. But don't you think my father might be told that I am here?"

"I'll ask Doctor Metcalf when he comes; or, you might ask him yourself," replied Psyche, rising.

"Where are you going? Don't run away yet. I have seen nothing of you since I have been in the house, and I want to talk to you about coming to stay with us," said Vere, going over to the fireplace and leaning his shoulders against the mantle-shelf.

"I thought you would want to write your letter, and I was going to lie down for an hour. You see, I was up with uncle nearly all night," she answered, moving towards the door.

"Of course, I forgot. You must be quite worn out. Still, I should like you to stop a few minutes. My letter will keep, and I want to talk to you. I may not see you again alone before I leave."

The girl hesitated a moment, and then, withdrawing her hand from the door-handle, replied gently, but with an air of weariness, "Oh, I'll stay as long as you like—at least till I'm wanted up-stairs;" and slowly crossing the room, seated herself at the window.

"Psyche, my dear girl, you are not well; you are overdoing yourself with this nursing business," said Vere, compassionately, as he remarked how pale and tired she looked in the cold gray light of the November morning.

"Oh, I'm all right, thanks. Nursing suits me; it's my vocation;" and she tried to summon a smile.

"I don't think it. Your vocation is to be happy, and you oughtn't to be allowed to devote your whole life to others like this, at the sacrifice of your own comfort and pleasure. I may say it because I know what you have done for me, and what you are doing for my father."

"It pleases me, and I hope doesn't hurt others. Chacun à son goût," said Psyche, simply.

"That I firmly believe," Vere answered, warmly, crossing over to her and taking her hand in his; "and I, for one, have every reason to bless your sweet unselfishness. But I don't see why you should injure your health into the bargain."

"What makes you think I am not well?" asked the girl, in a low voice, averting her eyes and gently striving to withdraw her hand.

"Well, to begin with, you don't look it; and then—I hardly know how to put it—but you seem more silent—not so jolly and lively as you used to be."

"You forget that I have advanced in years. You surely can't expect a grown-up woman to dance about like a skittish girl. It is four years since we played together the merry pranks that you seem to regret," she replied, with a momentary gleam of merriment.

"It's not four years, nor forty years, that have altered you—as something has done. What it is I can't say. Look here, Psyche, at the risk of offending my dearest friend and warmest ally, I must have it off my mind. You're not the same *to me* as you used to be.



Now, what's the reason of it?" And Vere took both her hands and looked straight into her eyes.

A deep flush spread swiftly over the girl's face. For a moment she raised her eyes to his with an imploring expression, like a hunted deer brought to bay. She seemed about to speak, then checked herself. A deathly pallor chased the color from her cheeks, and starting up, she cried, as if in pain, "You hurt me, Vere; let go my hands."

"What is it? What have I done?" he asked, anxiously and somewhat bewildered.

"It's nothing; only your ring squeezed my finger," Psyche replied, striving to speak unconcernedly.

"Let me look. By Jove, it's bleeding! It's that wretched filigree business that Carmen gave me when we were engaged. I'm always scratching people with it. I'm awfully sorry; let me bind it up for you."

"No, thank you; it's all right; I'll do it up-stairs," and without waiting his reply she hurried out of the room.

A tiny scratch like that hardly seemed sufficient warrant for such a demonstration—particularly from one who had been accustomed to play with boys, and take her share of buffets and rough usage with masculine fortitude. But Vere attributed it to a low state of health, and determined before he left to speak seriously to his mother on the subject.

Meanwhile, in the privacy of her own apartment, Psyche, with flushed cheeks and beating heart, was severely taking herself to task for her loss of self-command. Before Vere's arrival she had thoroughly considered and schooled herself in the line of conduct which was to guide her in his presence. She would be friendly—sympathetic even, if the occasion demanded it—and would let him see that absence had not in any way tended to diminish the cousinly interest that she had always felt for and expressed in him. But in self-defence she would, as far as possible, avoid that personal contact and a renewal of those tender confidences which in times gone by had exercised such a sweet and dangerous influence over her mind. Not but what she thought that the warmer affection (which, to her shame, she now knew had prompted her actions, and which she even now hesitated to acknowledge under its true name) was, if not extinguished, at any rate so carefully repressed that there was no danger of its peeping forth unadvisedly, and of betraying the secret which she would rather die than confess.

But the task was harder than she had imagined. To see him, to speak with him, to feel the warm pressure of his hand and the kindly sympathy in his voice, and to be forced to restrain the wild promptings of her heart, which bade her own her delight in his presence, was almost more than she could bear. She felt that she could not trust herself to play the character of an affectionate cousin without the risk of overdoing the part. And so she elected to keep him at arm's-length, and let him think her changed, cold, capricious—what he would—anything rather than the weak, unhappy fool that she was.



His persistence, however, was bidding fair to break down the frail barriers behind which lay her trembling, hopeless love. And then she shuddered to think of the consequences. Either he would openly scorn and despise her, or he would pity and grieve for her, while marvelling at her unmaidenly boldness. In any case she would lose his respect and esteem, to say nothing of irretrievably forfeiting her own.

The case was desperate, and required drastic treatment. She must invent some excuse for quitting Danverfield immediately, and once free from the spell of his presence, nothing should induce her to again subject herself to a like danger until, by some means or other, she had torn out the canker from her heart, and could meet him face to face without misgiving or emotion.

Fortunately for Psyche, the necessity for this extreme step—which she clearly foresaw might lead to awkward surmises and questionings—was obviated before she had time to decide on her course of action.

The reply which Vere received to his letter addressed to Mademoiselle Delaforet contained intelligence so disquieting that he decided to return immediately to France without waiting to see his father, who was still pronounced too weak to bear the excitement of an interview.

In acquainting his family with his newly formed resolve, Vere was careful to minimize the importance of the circumstances which hastened his departure. "Carmen was not very well, and was naturally anxious for his return. Besides, he was neglecting his work, and it would be so easy to run over again in a few weeks' time, when his father was quite restored," he said, by way of explanation to his mother. But to Psyche he was more explicit. The effect of her stern self-communings and relentless introspection had been to restore in some measure the self-command which the girl had gone so near losing at their previous interview. And although she felt nervous and ill at ease as she followed Vere into the squire's business room (whither he led the way as being out of the beat of the rest of the household), no sooner was she aware that he was in trouble and required her advice, than she banished "self" from her mind and addressed herself to the task of deciphering and elucidating Mademoiselle Delaforet's somewhat vague and mysterious communication with all her old energy and cool-headedness.

"I suppose we must allow something for the old lady's flowers of speech," she remarked, as she replaced the letter in its envelope and handed it back to Vere. "But apparently the fact remains that Carmen is out of sorts and unhappy, and I think you are quite wise to hurry back at once. I can't think what can have upset her so. She knew that you were bound to come alone, and that your detention here was unavoidable."

"I ought to have told you, perhaps, that we had a bit of a tiff before parting; but I thought it would have blown over before now," said Vere, moodily.

"She's such a spoiled child, and so impetuous, that it doesn't do



to interpret either her words or her actions too literally. But it seems strange that she refuses to accept Mademoiselle Delaforet's kind invitation, and persists in remaining at the *châlet* alone."

"It's stranger still that she should have had the vicomte to dinner in my absence, and that a man calling himself a gentleman should have been guilty of such a breach of *les convenances*, particularly after my letter. He wants kicking!"

"He can't have received it, surely? Then, too, you see, there was no great harm, since Mademoiselle Clarisse was present," said Psyche, anxiously noticing the suppressed wrath in her cousin's voice.

"It isn't so much that I imagine any actual harm was either intended or committed," he replied, bitterly, "but I don't approve of my wife making herself the talk of the entire neighborhood, to say nothing of openly disobeying my instructions."

"Let's hope it's not so bad as you think. And Vere, you won't think me interfering; but don't forget that Carmen is an orphan, and has no one to shield and guide her but you," cried Psyche, imploringly. "Poor child, she's not like other girls who have had a mother's care and love; and though she's quick-tempered and thoughtless, she's naturally warm-hearted and affectionate, and loves you dearly, I am sure."

"I wish she had adopted some other method of displaying her affection. However, you needn't alarm yourself—I have no intention of being too hard upon her—only, she must learn to obey as well as to love; for if I pull one way, and she the other, the matrimonial bond will stand in danger of coming asunder." Then, after a pause, Vere continued, in a lighter tone, "You needn't tell mother and the others all this. It's no use washing one's dirty linen more in public than one can help."

"You may depend upon me. When do you start?"

"To-morrow morning early. You will let me know how my father goes on? I don't half like leaving home without seeing him."

"It is tiresome, but it can't be helped. Perhaps you may be able to bring Carmen with you next time; at any rate, I'll do my best to arrange matters," said Psyche, moving towards the door.

"Thank you for all you have done, and are doing for us. I don't know where I should be without my trusty ally and counsellor. I shall see you again before I start?" inquired Vere, following her and taking her hand.

Psyche's eyes drooped under his warm and affectionate gaze. "Yes, certainly, I'll come down to see you off. I mustn't stay any longer now, I have to relieve guard up-stairs;" and gently withdrawing her hand, she quitted the room with a feeling of relief at having passed through the ordeal so satisfactorily.



## CHAPTER XVII.

“So farewell Hope, and with Hope farewell Fear,  
Farewell Remorse, all Good to me is lost;  
Evil, be thou my Good.”—MILTON.

THE mingled agony of rage and despair which filled Carmen's heart when, in spite of commands and entreaties, Vere persisted in carrying out his intention of journeying to England alone, gave place after a while to a trembling dread lest he had taken his departure for good and all. Never before had she known him look so stern, nor address her so harshly, as when she strove to justify her own conduct by clothing in words the confused feelings of jealousy and suspicion which were rending her very soul.

What if she had totally extinguished the dying embers of his love in her attempts to rekindle them? Why had she not humbled herself before him, retracting her words, swearing that black was white—anything so as to have kept him at her side and away from the evil influences of her dreaded rival? For in this light had the indulgence of her insensate imaginings led her to regard Psyche. It was for her no longer a matter of doubt or question, but an accomplished fact, that she was supplanted in her husband's affection by her former dearest friend; and in her misery a thousand wild schemes of revenge flashed through her excited brain.

For hours after the sound of the retreating wheels of the vehicle which bore him to the station had died out of her ears, Carmen remained locked in the little parlor—now restlessly pacing up and down, now with her pale and tear-stained face glued against the window-pane, in the vain expectation that he might relent and return, and now sinking hopeless, and bitterly weeping, on to the nearest chair, or even on to the hard oaken floor.

Several times during the morning Louise knocked at the door, and implored her young mistress to calm herself and let her in. Carmen remained obdurate, vouchsafing no answer, and the woman returned to her kitchen more than half alarmed at the fury of the storm which she had helped to evoke, and now seemed powerless to allay.

“Mon Dieu!” she mentally ejaculated. “What a to-do about nothing! As if any man living was worth all this fuss. Ah, my dear young lady, when your husband shows himself in his true colors and treats you as mine did me, it will be time enough for despair. But women are fools when they love—and men, bah! they are always brutes.”

Possibly Louise believed herself to be actuated by a tender affection for her young mistress when she counselled resistance to her husband's commands. But underlying this was a feeling of antagonism and antipathy to Vere, firstly because he was a man, and as



such a natural enemy of her sex; secondly because he was a foreigner; and lastly because she believed that he regarded her with distrust and suspicion. Naturally narrow-minded and vindictive, the intensity of her own grief led her to view the happiness of others as a personal insult. Having from the first determined that Vere was to prove faithless and untrue, she had set to work with malicious delight to square the facts with her theories. Thus, her professed regard for Carmen did not in any way interfere with her scheme for utilizing M. de Malsherbes as an instrument for avenging on Vere the wrongs she herself had suffered at the hands of her own husband.

As the morning wore on a carriage came slowly toiling up the hill, and stopped in front of the chalet. Instantly Carmen unbarred the door and precipitated herself into the little front garden in the belief that Vere had returned. Great, therefore, was her disappointment when the youngest Mademoiselle Delaforet descended and advanced to meet her with a gay smile.

"I am come to take you back to the Pension, or to stay with you if you prefer it," cried Mademoiselle Clarisse. "Which is it to be?"

Then, noticing Carmen's haggard and dishevelled appearance, she continued, in a sympathetic voice, "What, still in tears for the absent one! Come, Carmen, let us be brave. It is not for long, and I will be your protector;" and linking her arm through her friend's, she led her into the house.

After many entreaties she managed to extract from the weeping girl a more or less confused account of her woes, and then proceeded to apply the balm of sympathy without stopping to inquire too closely into the rights of the case.

"Console yourself, *chérie*. Love without its quarrels is like veal without salt. And probably *ce mauvais sujet* is now suffering agonies of remorse. See! You and I will put our heads together and award some punishment meet for his transgression. It will help to pass the time till his return," said Mademoiselle Clarisse, jokingly.

Carmen considered a moment. The storm had spent itself, and the mere act of unburdening her mind of its troubles brought relief.

"Swear you will help me to punish him," she cried, eagerly.

"Certainly, if you can prove that he deserves it," replied her friend, still smiling.

"You shall judge for yourself. Listen."

"Pardon, *chérie*; but had we not better first decide whether I remain here, or you return with me. My *sac de nuit* is in the carriage. Shall we take it out, or put yours in?"

"Stay here with me," cried Carmen. "I am too unhappy to meet strangers."

Mademoiselle Clarisse laughed softly to herself at the intense earnestness with which the girl invested the situation, but she knew her too well to attempt to contradict her in her present mood; so, after dismissing the driver with a verbal message for her sister, she devoted her mind, not unsuccessfully, to diverting the conversation to more cheerful topics.



Worn out with the day's excitement, Carmen retired early to rest, and woke in the morning refreshed in body and mind, and with a disposition to regard matters in a more cheerful light than she had deemed it possible on the previous day.

At nineteen our sorrows do not weigh so heavily on us as in later life, and, after all, youth has so many consolations. The superabundant vitality and energy which, in a nervously excitable temperament like Carmen's, magnifies mole-hills into mountains suffice to carry the imagination soaring above its self-created obstructions, and lead it to construct its theories of happiness on the same exaggerated basis as its former griefs—once the rebound has commenced.

Almost at the same hour that Vere had arrived, weary and half frozen, at his journey's end, Carmen, standing in front of her looking-glass, in her cosy little bedroom, was sunning herself in the pale rays of the Day-giver, who was successfully struggling to dispel the cold morning mist, which, under cover of the darkness, had mounted slowly and silently from the river below. The hardy forest pines recked little of frost and the fast approaching winter, and to show their independence had bravely affronted the soft, white, insidious foe, standing forth, draped in spangled sheen, like a regiment of giants clad in bejewelled armor. Down in the valley the fog still held its own; but as the sun's attacks grew more and more vigorous, one misty battalion after another was rolled back and dispersed, and the result of the conflict was no longer doubtful, while on the higher ground, where the chalet stood, birds and beasts were already sounding their joyful peans of their champion's victory.

Carmen gazed entranced for a few moments on the beauties of Nature. Then, as she caught the reflection of her own form in the glass, she feasted her eyes on what, in her opinion, was beauty in a higher stage of perfection.

A bright flush still mantled on her cheeks, warm from the kiss of "Nature's soft nurse," and in the depths of her lovely eyes lingered the soft, dreamy expression of a consciousness still tinged with the reminiscences of its late excursion into dream-land—a happy smile, which owed its inception as much to the delight of being as to the enjoyment of her own transcendent beauty, played around her lips.

"If Vere could only see me now, surely I should have nothing to fear from any rival," she exclaimed, triumphantly, half aloud. Then bending forward, with a childlike impulse of gratitude to herself for being so charming, she kissed her own reflection, and proceeded to address it in a thousand little terms of endearment.

The entrance of Louise with her cup of chocolate put a stop to this delightful entertainment. But the feelings of relief and security to which it gave expression remained, and displayed themselves still further in the care which she bestowed upon her toilet. "Who knows?" she argued; "perhaps he has only pretended to go away, to frighten me, and will return all of a sudden. Well, if he does, he will find me prepared." And again she nodded joyously at her dainty likeness.

Louise was delighted with the change in her mistress's mood, for,



while relieving her mind of some anxiety, it led her to believe that Carmen did not really care for her absent husband, and would readily fall in with her scheme for avenging the wrongs of her sex on the person of the perfidious Englishman. However, she thought it wiser not to revive the subject too soon, and contented herself with informing madame how charming she looked, much to Carmen's satisfaction. The girl loved praise from whatever source. Indeed, the secret of this woman's influence over her, and also that of M. de Malsherbes lay in the fact that they were always ready to gratify her craving for admiration, which Vere, from conscientious motives, persistently refused to do.

Mademoiselle Clarisse, too, accustomed as she was to her ex-pupil's changes of front, was fairly puzzled on finding the Niobe of the previous evening transformed into a smiling Hebe at so short a notice. However, being herself a light-hearted, laughter-loving soul, she congratulated herself on the metamorphosis, and soon abandoned the commiserating tone which she had thought it fitting to adopt at their first meeting.

The ladies passed the day in confidential chit-chat, and Carmen expressed to her friend her firm belief that Vere had not gone beyond Paris, and would return before nightfall. In the general *bouleversement* of the previous day all recollection of the projected dinner-party had escaped Carmen's memory, and neither she nor Vere had thought to countermand the extra delicacies which had been ordered in anticipation of the festive occasion. Consequently, when Louise entered to announce the arrival of the supplies from Bois-la-Reine, Carmen broke into a peal of merry laughter. "It's like the king's supper in the parable. The feast is prepared, and there are no guests. What shall we do? We cannot send the things back."

"If, as you expect, your husband returns to-night, we can make a feast in his honor," suggested Mademoiselle Clarisse.

"That would be charming. But it is a pity M. de Malsherbes and the others are not coming when all is ready."

"Why not invite M. le Vicomte all the same?" observed the wily Louise. "Surely madame is at liberty to entertain her friends, even if monsieur does choose to absent himself. What use otherwise is it to be a married lady?"

"I don't think it would look well," said Carmen, regretfully; "though it is done constantly in the *beau monde*. M. de Malsherbes told me so himself."

Mademoiselle Clarisse shook her head doubtfully. "It would be great fun. I am dying to make the nearer acquaintance of the vicomte. But your husband would not like it. It may be *comme il faut* in his world, but not in ours."

"What, not with mademoiselle to do propriety?" asked Louise, sarcastically.

"It would serve Vere right if he doesn't come back like a good boy," cried Carmen, warming to the scheme because her friend opposed it.



"Why not let me prepare the dinner for three?" said Louise. "If monsieur returns, well; if not, we must take steps to fill his place."

"The notion is good!" laughed Mademoiselle Clarisse, who regarded the affair as a joke; "but I doubt if Monsieur Vere would approve of the proposed substitution."

"Well, he must take the consequences of his obstinacy," exclaimed Carmen, with a flash of temper. "The fault is his, not mine."

"Well, well, let us wait and see what arrives. You are sure to hear from your husband before evening," said her friend, soothingly. Whereupon Louise retired with the determination of preparing the feast, and of securing the presence of M. de Malsherbes as the guest of the evening by some means or another.

Apart from the gratification of her personal spite against Vere, she felt that to do so would be a great diplomatic victory; since it would not only give her a stronger hold on her young mistress, but would earn her the gratitude of the vicomte. True, he was reputed neither wealthy nor generous; but then love will loosen the purse-strings of the veriest skinflint.

While busying herself in her little kitchen with the pros and cons of her scheme, Louise heard the click of the latch of the gate which opened from the diminutive back garden into the adjoining park, and looking out expectantly, beheld the slow approach of Monsieur Bernard, who filled the combined offices of steward, valet, footman, gardener, and general factotum at the château.

"Bon jour, Monsieur Bernard," she cried, effusively, as the old man appeared at the open door, looking very dignified, notwithstanding that he wore a blouse and sabots, and was carrying a basket. "What happy chance brings you here to-day?"

"Service des dames, madame, and the wishes of M. le Vicomte," replied the messenger, gazing loftily up at the ceiling. He had a slight bowing acquaintance with Louise, having met her walking in the park or the forest on several occasions; but he felt that, in his official capacity as ambassador from the château to the chalet, it would not be seemly to encourage any attempts at familiarity.

"A la bonne heure! I was just longing to see you," exclaimed Louise, in no wise daunted. "And what have you brought for us? Something nice, I'll be bound."

"M. le Vicomte presents his compliments to Monsieur Danvers, and begs the acceptance by madame, his charming wife, of these grapes and flowers. We thought that, as madame entertains to-night, they might be acceptable, although we regret that, being so late in the season, they are but poor specimens of our produce. A month back we could have offered madame something more worthy of her."

"Oh, how charming! Madame will be delighted," said Louise, peeping into the basket, and debating in her own mind whether she should enlighten the vicomte's evident ignorance of the departure of Carmen's husband, or leave him to find it out for himself.

"Am I to convey back any reply to M. le Vicomte?" inquired Monsieur Bernard, with a shade of impatience.



"Only madame's grateful thanks. I believe she is taking a siesta now, so I will not disturb her; and monsieur is not at home. But, as M. le Vicomte dines here this evening, madame will be able to express her thanks in person, and that, I am sure, will give him more pleasure than the most eloquent messages—*hein*, Monsieur Bernard?" she replied, having decided to let matters take their own course, since that pointed in the direction of her wishes.

"I do not profess to interpret the sentiments of M. le Vicomte; I simply content myself with carrying out my instructions," said the old man, stiffly. "Having accomplished these, I have the honor, madame, of wishing you a good-day;" whereupon he took his departure.

Later on in the afternoon Vere's telegram arrived, and caused the upset of all Carmen's fondly cherished hopes. In her first disappointment she was disposed to abandon herself once more to moping and melancholy, and Louise, who had taken care to be present when the message was read, judged this a fitting opportunity for presenting the offering from M. de Malsherbes.

"You say he is coming to-night? Then Vere cannot have written to him after all. How very embarrassing—I am not well enough to receive visitors. I must send and put him off," cried Carmen, despondently.

"Then the poor man will have no dinner!" exclaimed Mademoiselle Clarisse, prompted by Louise. "Don't you think, dear, that, under the circumstances, we had better let him come? It would seem so rude to turn him away in the eleventh hour."

"The dinner will be exquisite—fit for a prince; that I'll guarantee," chimed in Louise. "But, of course, if madame is afraid that monsieur might scold her—" And she gave an expressive shrug.

"Scold me, indeed!" cried Carmen, her eyes flashing fire. "It is rather the other way. Understand, both of you, if I do not receive M. de Malsherbes, it is because I do not choose to, and not because I do not dare."

"Well, perhaps it will be wiser to ask him to defer his visit. People might talk," observed Mademoiselle Clarisse, cautiously.

"They are talking already—of monsieur's sudden desertion," replied Louise, in a loud undertone, as she left the room.

"Is that true what she says?" asked Carmen, fiercely, turning to Mademoiselle Clarisse.

"Is what true, dearest?"

"You know. About what people say of me—that I'm deserted by my husband."

"I have heard nothing, nor do I believe it," said the other, soothingly. "Of course, men have their business affairs, which they cannot always share with their wives."

"And their love affairs too," cried Carmen, with a sudden revival of her jealous fit. "Listen, Clarisse. I believe this is all a lie—this business with his father. He has gone to see his former sweetheart."

"Oh, Carmen, how can you talk so? I am sure your husband is the soul of honor."



"Where love is concerned, a man's honor counts for nothing. Louise says so, and she knows," cried the girl, excitedly.

"But, my dear child, what can a woman in her position know of the ways of gentlemen?"

"Don't talk to me. How, if he loved me, could he leave me alone like this? I will show him that if he can forget his duties, I, too, can forget mine. I will receive M. de Malsherbes, and if I can make Vere suffer some of the torments he has inflicted upon me, I shall be happy;" and Carmen, having lashed herself into a state of wild fury by the recital of her imaginary wrongs, dashed out of the salon and locked herself in her room.

Poor Mademoiselle Clarisse was sorely perplexed. She did not know in the slightest how far Carmen's suspicions were founded on fact; and even if, as she suspected, they were baseless, she had no authority to control her actions. All she could hope to do was to help the girl from committing any overt act of folly, and this end would be best attained by the avoidance of any open contradiction or attempts at dictation.

Accordingly, she settled herself in one of the velvet-covered fauteuils, and pulling out her embroidery with a deep sigh, fell to musing on the mutability of human happiness. A few months ago—how she had envied Carmen. A handsome, good-tempered, well-bred husband; a home of her own—comfortable and well-ordered. If ever there was a marriage of pure romance and love, surely this was one. And now—well, Mademoiselle Clarisse felt that even her own state of old-maidenhood, with all its monotonous and wearying round of duties and cares, was preferable to that of wedded misery, and she took the opportunity of reading her own heart a little lecture on the folly of the romantic aspirations in which it still occasionally indulged.

Presently Louise entered, and began to arrange the flowers and to set the salon in order.

"Does not mademoiselle intend to change her dress? Dinner is for seven o'clock," she remarked.

"Is M. de Malsherbes coming, then, after all?" asked Mademoiselle Clarisse, arousing herself.

"Certainly; was he not invited?"

"And madame—is she dressing to receive him?"

"I have been with madame this last half-hour. She will look *ra-bissante*, I promise you."

"I wish now he was not coming," said Mademoiselle Delaforet.

"It will be so embarrassing."

"Have no fear. Madame has plenty of courage when her mind is made up; and M. le Vicomte will have no eyes or ears but for her. Allez," replied Louise with a triumphant grin.

Mademoiselle Clarisse made no reply, but there was something in the woman's tone and manner that grated against her feelings. French ladies—more especially in the provinces—are accustomed to a familiarity of address from their servants, and to their habit of interesting themselves in the affairs of their superiors; but Carmen's



*bonne* seemed to be actuated by some stronger motive than mere inquisitiveness or love of talking, and Mademoiselle Clarisse had the unpleasant sensation that the woman regarded her as a tool or an accomplice in some nefarious project. In which supposition she was more nearly right than she actually imagined.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

“Love like a shadow flies when substance love pursues,  
Pursuing that that flies, and flying what pursues.”

SHAKESPEARE.

PUNCTUALLY at the stroke of seven M. de Malsherbes made his entry into the little salon where Carmen and Mademoiselle Clarisse sat ready to receive him.

The former had devoted unusual attention to her toilet, and hers was a style of beauty that well repaid the trouble of careful adornment. One large white camellia—which had formed a portion of the vicomte’s floral offering—glistened like a star in her blue-black tresses, another nestled in the front of her dress, presenting a vivid contrast between its own cold, snowy beauty and the warm, living tints of the bosom against which it rested. The excitement of the moment had banished all traces of her previous trouble, and lent a brilliancy to her eyes and a heightened color to her cheeks that rendered her absolutely dazzling and bewitching. At least so she appeared to the amorous vicomte, as, gibus in hand, he stood before her, confusedly muttering the conventional greetings, and wondering how the possessor of so dangerously beautiful a wife could trust her for a moment out of his sight.

What, then, was his surprise when Carmen, in a hesitating tone and with visible embarrassment of manner, began to apologize for her husband’s absence. In spite of her confident assertions, she was not without some doubts as to the strict propriety of her behavior, and now that the crucial moment had arrived, she dreaded lest the vicomte should think her bold and unladylike—little dreaming, in her ignorance of his sentiments towards her and of the ways of his world, that he would interpret her conduct as a direct encouragement to his passion.

“My husband was obliged to start for England at a moment’s notice, and I can only suppose that, in the confusion and hurry of his departure, he omitted to let you know that our little party would have to be postponed,” she said, hurriedly, keeping her eyes the while fixed upon the ground and tapping the floor nervously with her little foot.

Had she witnessed the gleam of triumph which shot through her listener’s eyes as he reflected that whatever her husband’s intentions might have been, *she* had expected him to come, it would in no wise have tended to restore her composure. But M. de Malsherbes was not a young beginner, to frighten away the pretty bird he wished to



allure by too precipitate action, so he answered calmly, and in a tone of extreme politeness and deference, "No, I rejoice to say, I had no countermand from Monsieur Danvers. And grieved as I am to miss the pleasure of seeing him, I should have been a thousand times more unhappy had I been debarred from the delight of meeting you again, to which I have looked forward so anxiously."

Carmen took courage at these words. It was evident that she had nothing to reproach herself with, or so competent a judge of the *bienséances* would not offer her such distinct approval. Then, to complete her justification, she added, "When your kind present and message reached me this afternoon, I was puzzled to know how to act. At first I thought of sending you a line to explain how I was situated and to ask you to defer your visit. But my friend, Mademoiselle Delaforet, urged that, under the circumstances, it might put you to some inconvenience, and so I decided not to disturb existing arrangements. I only hope that you will excuse the absence of a host, and not find our society insupportably dull;" and she looked up into his face with a charming, coquettish smile.

M. de Malsherbes, more and more entranced, bowed low, with his hand over his heart. "Ah, madame," he cried, "you are mocking me. As though one could ever be dull with *you*. If I only dared to give utterance to my thoughts, I should say—" But noticing in the girl's face a shade of surprise and of incipient alarm, apparently called forth by the warmth of his expression, he wisely restrained himself, and, turning to Mademoiselle Delaforet, treated her to a high-flown panegyric on her kind intercession on his behalf, which served to soften down the pointedness of his too openly expressed admiration for Carmen, and to fill up the time until dinner was announced.

Throughout the evening M. de Malsherbes bore the brunt of the conversation, which he addressed almost exclusively to his beautiful hostess. He felt himself decidedly *en veine*, and this was an opportunity for completing his conquest that was not to be lost; for, without being more fatuous than most men of his stamp, he was morally convinced that Carmen had succumbed to his charms and graces, and, like a ripe peach, was ready to fall into his hand so soon as he saw fit to extend it. Her pretty embarrassment about the accident—or, as he chose to believe it, design—which had caused the miscarriage of her husband's explanatory note, the presence even of Mademoiselle Delaforet, he regarded merely as so many little feminine artifices for saving the outward appearances. And if he did not urge his suit more openly, or at once assume the airs of "the man in possession," it was simply because, besides being a connoisseur, he was something of an epicure, and liked to study the menu and smack his lips in anticipatory delight before sitting down to the feast.

Carmen's behavior, indeed, on that eventful evening was such as almost to justify the vicomte's theory, besides causing no small astonishment and alarm to her less mercurial friend and chaperon. Excitement of any kind mounted to the girl's head like new wine. And this present fit, following on two days of intense depression, and combined with the subtle incense of the vicomte's flattery, and the



knowledge that she was avenging herself on Vere for his unkind desertion, had an almost intoxicating effect upon her senses. She talked, she laughed, she bandied jests with him as though he were an intimate friend, and the sight of Mademoiselle Delaforet's terrified face only redoubled her enjoyment, and led her to lavish yet more freely the smiles and glances which evidently exerted so potent an influence on their distinguished visitor.

Like a rebellious child, she gloried in her naughtiness, and, reckless of consequences, hugged herself with the belief that, by proving her powers of fascination over so great a personage as M. de Malsherbes, she would be exalted in her own eyes and in those of her too callous and unappreciative husband.

Meanwhile Mademoiselle Clarisse sat a silent and uneasy spectator of this barefaced exhibition of conjugal infidelity, for in no other sense could she construe Carmen's extraordinary behavior, and of the vicomte's unrebuffed attempts to play the part of an ardent admirer.

Nothing but a sense of duty towards the misguided girl kept her from leaving the room in disgust, and but for the awe in which she stood of M. de Malsherbes, she would have openly expressed her disapprobation of his conduct. But, indeed, they scarcely seemed to heed her presence at all. Carmen sang and accompanied the vicomte, who rolled his eyes and quavered out love-songs in a truly pathetic manner. Then they performed duets, and, finally, when the girl pressed him to recite some of his own verses, the enraptured poet declaimed an ode which he asseverated was composed expressly in her honor, and which abounded in sentiments that, even in poetry, sounded a little *risqué* when addressed to another man's wife.

At last, to Mademoiselle Clarisse's extreme relief, M. de Malsherbes rose to go. "It is late, and I must not intrude myself any longer," he said, regretfully. "I go, but not to sleep. No; Venus has a more potent sway than Somnus. But I shall dream. Yes, I shall dream; and can you guess of whom?" he asked, as he bent tenderly over Carmen's hand.

"I'm not good at riddles; ask Mademoiselle Delaforet," said Carmen, maliciously.

"If you cannot divine, no one shall know," he replied, in a low whisper. "But some day I will venture to tell you—when we are alone."

"Well, good-night; I dare say it will keep," said the girl, wearily.

The reaction was beginning to set in, and she was disposed to find her quasi-eccentric admirer somewhat fatiguing.

"Good-night, sweet lady. When shall I have the felicity of seeing you again?" asked the vicomte, in a tender undertone. "Make it soon, for life is a blank for me till then."

Carmen laughed merrily in a disconcerting manner. "Oh, I don't know. You can call if you like; or you can wait till my husband returns, if he ever intends to return."

"Bonté du ciel! Is there any question of that? What do you mean?" exclaimed M. de Malsherbes, trembling with excitement.



“Mean? Oh, nothing. Only that my husband has gone to visit an old flame—and who knows?—men are so fickle.”

“Not all! Not I! You may believe me when I say that nothing shall ever remove your image from my heart.”

Although Mademoiselle Clarisse had said good-night, she still remained in the room, apparently engrossed in her book, and the vicomte had to restrain the wild desire which possessed him to clasp his fair enslaver to his breast, and thus emphasize his declaration of eternal fidelity. Instead of being warned of the risk she was running by the increasing boldness of his language and the irrepressible fervor of his emotion, Carmen made no attempt to rebuke him, but only smiled up in his face with a look of innocent wonderment not unmingled with mischievous amusement.

“I make no exceptions—and least of all in your case, she exclaimed, with an air of indifference that utterly bewildered her ardent adorer. “Good-night once more. Poor Mademoiselle Delaforet is dying of fatigue. Adieu! Au revoir! Thank you so much for taking compassion on our loneliness.”

Whereupon M. de Malsherbes, feeling that nothing was to be gained by prolonging his visit, took his departure, inwardly cursing Mademoiselle Clarisse for having prevented him from taking advantage of his fair hostess’s softer mood, which, while it lasted, promised so much, though—had he known her better—meant so little for him.

As a matter of fact, throughout the whole of that eventful evening Carmen had been playing a part. In her inmost heart Vere still remained enthroned supreme. Even when she most believed him cold and false, and while she was striving by her conduct to avenge herself and prove how little she cared for him, her whole soul was yearning after him with a passionate longing that only served to spur her on to fresh acts of perverse wilfulness. She almost persuaded herself that Vere was present all the time, an invisible spectator, writhing in the throes of a jealousy which it was her one aim to excite and keep alive. For the unhappy vicomte she had no thought or feeling. He was a handy instrument for her purpose; young enough and sufficiently good-looking to constitute a formidable *vraisemblance* of the rival with whom she hoped to checkmate Psyche’s advances and bring back Vere’s wandering affections. Then, too, he seemed disposed to enter into the character that she had allotted to him, and to play a lover’s part as it should be played, *con amore*, and with an excess of deference and a gloss of romance that helped to conceal the pitfalls and actual dangers of the path along which she was so thoughtlessly treading.

Nevertheless, as far as she personally was concerned, Carmen found the comedy rather fatiguing and inclined to drag with only Mademoiselle Clarisse for an audience, and she gave a deep sigh of relief as the curtain fell—with the departure of M. de Malsherbes.

“Is he not amusing, our neighbor?” she cried, flinging herself into a deep-seated chair, and gazing up with malicious delight at her companion, who stood in the doorway, candle in hand, with an ex-



pression compounded of disgust and pity. Mademoiselle Clarisse seemed to be hesitating whether to retire without speaking, or to give open vent to her feelings, and Carmen, struck with the comicality of the situation, burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter. "You are too droll. Why do you look at me like that?" she gasped, burying her face in the cushions.

Mademoiselle Clarisse, all good-tempered that she was, flushed as red as a turkey-cock at this additional evidence of levity and heartlessness. "It is shameful! It is incredible! I would not have believed that a young girl brought up as you have been, and situated as you are, could behave like— Well, perhaps I had better not say what."

In vain Carmen strove to check her laughter in order to defend herself against her friend's violent onslaught; she could not even summon anger to her aid, and only answered with one hysterical peal after the other.

"I shall leave you now to yourself, and to-morrow I quit this house," continued Mademoiselle Clarisse, quite sternly for her. "It is no longer a fit place for a woman who respects either her own character or the honor of her sex. If, after a night's reflection, you perceive the truth of my remarks and the danger of the path you are treading, let me implore you to accompany me to my sister's home. There you will be safe from him and from yourself." Whereupon, and without waiting for any response, the virtuously indignant lady swept out of the room, leaving Carmen more convulsed than ever.

Presently Louise entered to inquire if her young mistress was not ready for bed, and finding her still in a state of mingled laughter and tears, ventured to ask what had happened.

"Ah, Louise, if you had only heard her and seen her face! It was enough to kill one," cried the girl, bursting out anew.

"Pray calm yourself, madame. To whom do you refer?—to Mademoiselle Delaforet?"

"Of course. She was so outraged by my behavior, and by the attentions which M. de Malsherbes paid me—she thinks I am lost—utterly lost."

"We must make excuses for her—being an old maid, and likely to remain one," said the woman, viciously. "She is doubtless jealous because you monopolized M. le Vicomte so entirely. As though he would look at her when you were in the room. Ah, there is *un amant comme il faut*—high-born, good-looking, discreet. Decidedly madame is in luck's way."

"You talk nonsense, Louise. What is M. de Malsherbes to me, or I to him?" cried Carmen, with some show of indignation.

"What he is to you I cannot say, although I know that half the ladies in the department would give their eyes to secure his favor; but what you are to him, poor man—that anybody can see with half an eye."

The implied flattery of these words was irresistibly alluring to Carmen. That was her great desire—to triumph where others failed.



Still she replied, loyally, "But he is not to compare with my husband."

"I thought madame had doubts as to whether her husband was hers only, or whether she shared his affections with the *Mees Anglaise là bas*," said Louise, craftily.

Carmen sprang from her recumbent position with a smothered cry of grief and rage, and so furious did she look, that the woman, fearing for her bodily safety, moved quickly towards the door.

"Never venture to address such words to me again, or I will turn you out of the house," cried the girl, her face ablaze with fierce anger and pain. Then, mastering her passion with a violent effort, she added, in a milder tone, "It is partly my own fault for ever having confided in such as you. Now go; your presence drives me mad."

"May I not assist madame to undress?" asked Louise, humbly.

"No, leave me. I can dispense with your services for to-night."

For a long time Carmen remained alone in the salon brooding over her misery, which the woman's words had called into fresh life. At length the guttering candles warned her of the lateness of the hour, and she retired to her room, where sleep tardily fell on her aching eyes and afforded her temporary relief from the torturing question that repeated itself with maddening monotony and persistence, "Is it true that he loves another?"

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## CHAPTER XIX.

"Ah! did we take for Heaven above  
But half such pains—such pains  
As we take day and night for woman's love,  
What angels we should be."—THOMAS MOORE.

As he wended his way towards home M. de Malsherbes felt as though he was walking on air. The influence of his passion for Carmen was still strong upon him—so strong that it banished all other thoughts and desires that did not owe their inspiration to her fascinations. Having nursed for so many years the belief that he was dead to the world and to the charms of the opposite sex, this sudden reawakening of his heart, or his senses, came upon him like a miraculous revelation, and the romantic side of his nature lent it a poetic glamour which blinded him to the ugly matter-of-fact view of the situation.

Early training and his entire course of life had tended to foster his inherent selfishness. That self-denial in others is a commendable virtue he was quite disposed to admit, but it never entered his brain to practise it himself. Thus, while professing and believing that he entertained feelings of the most profound devotion for his new divinity, he was utterly callous to the thought of the ruin which the fulfilment of his cherished desires must inevitably work upon her. The cup of happiness was close to his lips. Would it not be the height of folly to be restrained from draining it by any old-



womanish scruples about consequences? He adored her, and she was ready to return his passion. That must suffice for the present; the future could take care of itself.

Thus philosophizing, and with the refrain of Carmen's last song, "Per la vita io t'amero," on his lips, the amorous vicomte sought his couch, and passed half the night in composing odes and sonnets in praise of his mistress's charms—all masterpieces of passionate and tuneful eloquence, but which, alas! entirely eluded his memory when he strove to recall and transcribe them on the morrow.

As soon as it was daylight he rose, and, dressing himself with unusual care, went out into the park and sauntered down towards the chalet, in order to feast his eyes on the outside view of his beloved one's dwelling; for more than that, at so early an hour, even he did not anticipate.

Presently his heart gave a great bound as one of the windows was opened and the *persiennes* thrown back. From where he stood he could not distinguish the features of the early-rising inmate, but he fatuously imagined that the magnetic influence of love had wakened Carmen from her slumbers and warned her of his proximity. This notion exactly accorded with the romantic frenzy by which his whole mind was possessed. He stole softly nearer to the open window, and, concealing his lanky person behind a clump of shrubs, began to sing in a quavery undertone,

"L'aube nait et ta porte est close  
 Ma belle pourquoi sommeiller  
 À l'heure où s'éveille la rose  
 Ne vas tu pas, te reveiller?  
 O ma charmante écoute ici  
 L'amant qui chante et pleure aussi.  
 Tout frappe à ta porte benie  
 L'aurore dit: Je suis le jour,  
 L'oiseau dit: Je suis l'harmonie,  
 Et mon cœur dit: Je suis l'amour.  
 O ma charmante écoute ici  
 L'amant qui chante et pleure aussi."

The damp rawness of a November morning is not conducive to clearness of voice, and he was forced to stop in order to clear his throat before intoning the third couplet. Scarcely had he recommenced with

"Je t'adore ange et t'aime femme,"

when the door of the chalet opened, and Louise appeared, broomstick in hand.

"Come out, you drunken rascal," she cried, in irate tones. "I'll teach you to make this vile caterwauling under respectable people's windows at seven o'clock in the morning."

This was a rude awakening from his poetic dreams, and, horrified at his undignified position, the vicomte meditated instant flight. But, before he could execute his project, retreat was cut off; for the incensed domestic, instead of approaching his hiding-place, made a



flank movement towards the garden gate, which she proceeded to lock with grim determination. Deeming it hopeless to attempt to escape undiscovered, M. de Malsherbes decided to make himself known. Accordingly, he rose from his crouching position, and, stepping forward, began in his most mellifluous tones, *Bon jour, madame*; I fear that I have alarmed you by my untimely visit, but I dropped something in the garden last night, and thought I would come to look for it myself before the household was up."

"M. le Vicomte! Is it possible?" cried the woman, with feigned astonishment. "What is it that you have lost? Can I assist you?"

"Oh, it is of no consequence; a little trinket off my watch-chain. It is so small that it has probably got trampled into the earth. Still, if you—if you—will keep your eyes open when you are walking in the garden"—and M. de Malsherbes slipped a napoleon into her expectant hand—"perhaps you may find it, although I cannot."

"*Merci, Monsieur*! Be sure I will keep my eyes well open," replied Louise, with a meaning smile. "And my ears too," she added to herself.

"You need not acquaint madame of my loss. I shall call later in the day to inform her myself, and also to inquire after her health. You have not seen her this morning?"

"No, monsieur. She is not yet awake. She seemed strangely disturbed last night after monsieur had gone, and I fear she has not slept much."

"Indeed! What could have occurred to disturb her? Have you any idea?" asked the vicomte, secretly delighted.

"Ah! monsieur knows best himself. He has much to answer for," said the woman, dropping her eyes and toying with her broomstick.

"Tell me what you mean. You may trust me," cried M. de Malsherbes, excitedly. "You know what an interest I take in your charming lady."

Louise shook her head. "I know what I know, but I dare not speak. I might lose my situation."

"Never mind your situation. I will find you another."

"Monsieur must pardon me. I remember the old proverb—'a bird in the hand—'"

"Here, take this as an earnest of my protection;" and again he slid a golden token into her greedy fingers. "And now tell me what you know."

"I think my information is worth further consideration. But I leave that to monsieur's sense of honor."

"Peste! I will give you a hundred francs if all turns out well; but can't you see I am dying with impatience?"

"Well, so much I can tell you—madame is very unhappy."

"Yes; go on."

"She is madly jealous. She believes her husband is deceiving her."

"So much the better."

"Being young, and quite inexperienced, she appeals to me for advice—as I have been married and know the ways of husbands."



"Parbleu! And what do you tell her?"

"I do not love this English bear; in fact, I hate the whole race of husbands. If I can *afford* to speak my mind, I shall advise her to pay him back in his own coin," said Louise, looking up with a crafty smile to see if she had made her meaning sufficiently plain.

"And will she listen to you?" asked the vicomte, eagerly.

"To me, and to you?—yes, if you make it worth my while, and go to work in the proper manner."

"I will do both. I am ready to go through fire and water to secure her love," he cried, in a voice of exultation.

"Monsieur need not proceed to extremities. All that he has to do is to act circumspectly towards madame and generously towards me; and for the rest, to be guided by my advice."

"I understand, and am quite disposed to acknowledge your valuable services," said the vicomte, preparing to depart. "Apropos, will you be so good as to inform your lady that I shall give myself the pleasure of calling this afternoon?"

Louise looked dubious. "I think you will do well to defer your visit for a few days. That Mademoiselle Delaforet might take alarm, and if it comes into her head to put our Englishman on his guard—*Pouf!*"

"Yes, yes, perhaps you are right; but how shall I know when to come?"

"Leave that to me. I will call at the château as soon as I think the ground is prepared. Au revoir, M. le Vicomte, et bonne chance." So saying, the woman made him a mock obeisance, and retired indoors.

It is not difficult to stifle a conscience that is rarely listened to and still more rarely obeyed; and M. de Malsherbes was too much occupied during the rest of the day with his anticipated happiness to pay much heed to the "still small voice" that had at first raised itself in vain protest against his dishonorable designs, and the shameful alliance into which he had entered for their furtherance. His main anxiety was lest, in confiding his passion to Carmen's maid, he was placing himself in the power of a woman who was evidently both dangerous and unscrupulous. However, he found consolation in the reflection that it was to her interest to keep his secret, and for the rest, it was only one of the risks inseparable from affairs of the sort, and for which he must be fully prepared.

In the whirl and confusion of ideas that were pressing through his excited brain, he had formed no definite notion of how his little romance, as he delighted in terming it, was likely to end. He likened himself to a gallant knight, buckling on his armor to rescue some fair damsel from a tyrant enslaver, and, in the blindness of his infatuation, went near to persuading himself that he was about to perform a meritorious action. Still, crazy dreamer though he was, he had sufficient common-sense in his more lucid moments to consider the advisability of making some preparations in case the necessity should arise for his sudden flight, either with or without the object of his adoration.



In this view, and also as a means of passing the weary hours during which he was debarred from a sight of his charmer, he decided to journey up to Paris, and consult his solicitor on the prospects of his being able to raise sufficient funds to travel abroad for a year. Accordingly, Bernard was summoned in feverish haste, and ordered to pack his master's valise, and to see that a vehicle was forth-coming to transport him to the station in time for the afternoon train. Had the heavens been about to fall, the old man could scarcely have been more astonished, but, as his grumbling queries were only answered by a peremptory reiteration of the command, he had to resign himself to unwilling obedience, and to apostrophizing the Holy Virgin on the sudden change in the vicomte's habits.

Meanwhile, Mademoiselle Clarisse had encountered her young hostess at breakfast with a visible embarrassment that had caused the latter no small amusement and delight. Carmen's sense of the ludicrous and mischievous tendencies were keenly awakened by her friend's solemn countenance, that told of mental anxiety and lectures to come. In her simple morning-dress, which harmonized well with the air of extreme demureness she had assumed for the occasion, the girl looked so bewitchingly innocent, that Mademoiselle Clarisse could not conceive her capable of the impropriety of conduct that over-night had seemed all too palpable. The good lady began to believe herself the victim of some hallucination, and the reproaches with which she intended to overwhelm the reprobate died unuttered on her lips.

"I hope you slept well, my dear," she began in a tone of mingled formality and affectionate interest that accurately reflected her perturbed state of mind. Then, fearing to commit herself by too sudden a resumption of friendly intercourse, she added, severely, "Though I shall be surprised if you have been able to do so at all after the proceedings of last night."

"Proceedings! What proceedings?" asked Carmen, with an air of naive wonderment. "Oh, I suppose you mean my attack of hysterics? That didn't interfere with my night's rest, I am happy to say. I was a little overtired, that was all; and something tickled my fancy and set me off. What was it, now? I declare I have almost forgotten."

"I am glad of that, and, for my part, I shall try to do the same. Perhaps it will be better for all parties that the subject should be buried in oblivion," replied Mademoiselle Clarisse, arching her eyebrows and gazing intently at the ceiling.

Carmen laughed a merry, rippling laugh, so indicative of ease of mind and freedom from self-reproach, that her friend felt more than ever perplexed and embarrassed. "What a fool I should have made of myself if I had said half the bitter things I intended," she thought, as her eyes rested admiringly on the girl's smiling and happy face.

"I know, dear, it was foolish of me to give way to it, but when once I am started I am difficult to stop," remarked Carmen, much amused by the other's puzzled expression, and purposely ignoring the reference to her behavior towards M. de Malsherbes.



A night's reflection had convinced her, that for the present at any rate, the continuance of the visit of Mademoiselle Clarisse was indispensable to the success of her scheme for reconquering Vere's affection through the instrumentality of the vicomte.

She needed a companion whose presence would be at once a protection against the ardor of M. de Malsherbes' advances, and an excuse to him for the unsatisfactoriness of the return she was able to accord to them—one who would be sufficiently alive to the danger her friend was running to take steps to put her husband on his guard, while yet ready to vouch that she had passed through it unscathed.

Now, Mademoiselle Clarisse exactly fulfilled all these requirements. And as Carmen did not consider her deeply-laid plot ready for its denouement, and feared, from the worthy lady's expressions of anger and disgust on the previous evening, that she was prepared to take immediate action, the little hypocrite determined to avoid any explanation, and to do her best to allay temporarily her friend's suspicions.

The opportune arrival of Vere's letter (the contents of which were made known in a previous chapter) enabled her to turn the conversation, and as during the next few days the vicomte did not intrude himself, Mademoiselle Clarisse began to feel quite easy in her mind.

Not so Carmen, who was more or less incredulous about the squire's illness, and in her jealous moods was apt to regard it as an artifice of her faithless husband's to serve as an excuse for prolonging his absence. Self-invented as these torments were, they were very real to her, and caused her sleepless nights and days of deep depression. She could not even seek distraction and gratify her thirst for vengeance by playing in the catlike fashion—instinctive in some women—with the affections of her admiring neighbor. Four days had passed since he had dined at the chalet, and still he showed no signs. As an act of common courtesy, he might have called to inquire after her well-being, and this neglect, following his ardent protestations of devotion, seemed quite inexplicable. Although she in no wise reciprocated the vicomte's passion, and, apart from his general fitness for the purpose she had in view, Carmen took but a very slight personal interest in him and his doings, his seeming indifference to her at this juncture was another large drop in her already overflowing cup of sorrows. How was Mademoiselle Clarisse to be impressed with the magnitude of the risks to which her friend was exposed during her husband's absence, and to be impelled to take upon herself to privately urge his immediate return when the source of danger appeared to have dried up? Carmen had feared at first that the action of her little comedy was proceeding too rapidly; but now it was dragging for the want of the principal character, the enterprising lover. And, to make matters worse, there was no one else at hand who could fill his part.

In the mean time, while the girl was brooding over the failure of her scheme, Louise, whose cupidity was now brought into play, was carefully watching events with a view to turning them to account in her own interests. She lost no opportunity of inquiring when, if



ever, monsieur thought of returning, and smiled incredulously when Carmen explained that he was detained by his father's mishaps. In spite of her previous rebuff, she even ventured to hint that Vere had found some more potent attraction than an old man's sick-bed to keep him so long away, and noted with satisfaction that this time her mistress allowed her innuendoes to pass unproved, and averted her face in silent anguish. But she felt that all her machinations were rendered fruitless by the presence of Mademoiselle Clarisse, and consequently hailed the announcement of that lady's departure with secret delight.

Mademoiselle Delaforet had written to say that she found her single-handed duties rather too onerous, and begged Clarisse to persuade her friend to accompany her to the Pension, and remain as their guest until her husband's return.

"Do come, dear," urged Mademoiselle Clarisse. "You see I am forced to go, for poor Mathilde evidently wants me, and it will be so lonely for you here. We shall be charmed to have you with us again. It will seem like old times."

"You are very kind, but I would rather remain at home," replied Carmen, despondently.

"Nonsense, child, you'll only mope yourself to death and imagine all sorts of miseries. Besides, you know, dear, it is your husband's wish."

No sooner had she spoken these words than Mademoiselle Clarisse perceived her mistake.

Carmen burst out in a furious rage. "My husband's wish! That is a great inducement. Is it likely I shall disturb myself to please him, seeing how he is treating me?"

"But, my dear Carmen, you have no evidence—"

"No; he takes care of that; but I have the evidence of my senses. I am neglected, deserted; what more do you want?"

"You will smile at your own folly when he returns in a few days," rejoined the other, soothingly. "I can't imagine what can have put such absurd ideas into your little head."

"Absurd or not, he'll find out his mistake. I'm not the sort of woman to be deceived with impunity;" and the girl darted out of the room in a storm of ungovernable passion, leaving poor Mademoiselle Clarisse to return to Boisy-la-Reine in a state of mental uneasiness and depression.

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## CHAPTER XX.

"And trust me not at all,  
Or all in all."—TENNYSON.

To hear some people talk, one might imagine that we in England have the sole monopoly of unpleasant weather.

If Vere had ever shared this delusion, he was in a fair way of being disabused of it, for from the time of his landing at Calais until



late in the evening when he quitted the train at Boisy-la-Reine, the rain fell in cold, unceasing torrents. Having been for the most part under shelter, he had avoided getting actually wet. But sitting all day cooped up in a railway-carriage in a chill, damp atmosphere is not conducive to bodily comfort, and as he drove towards the Pension his spirits were at their lowest ebb.

The intelligence conveyed in Mademoiselle Delaforet's letter, coupled with Carmen's persistent silence, had caused him considerable uneasiness, if not positive anxiety; and he had decided to call upon the old lady before meeting his wife for the purpose of learning what had actually occurred during his absence, and of thus enabling himself to mould his conduct accordingly.

Quite apart from the bond of mutual love which bound Carmen to him, his firm belief in the inherent purity of her sex, and equally strong faith in the sanctity of the matrimonial tie, prevented him from imagining that she had been guilty of aught worse than thoughtlessness, and the indulgence of her childish vanity and passion for admiration at the expense of M. de Malsherbes. Still, the notion of his wife's name being associated—however innocently—with that of a broken down and half crazy *roué*, for so he contemptuously regarded his supposed rival, was inexpressibly repugnant to him, and he determined to make his neighbor understand that his attentions must cease at once and for always. Before, however, taking the vicomte to task, he felt that he ought to be fully aware of how far he was personally to blame, because, leaving justice out of the question, any groundless accusations would not only place himself in a false position, but might make it appear as though he mistrusted his wife's sense of honor. To appeal to Carmen to appportion the censure due to folly in which she had participated, and had perhaps encouraged, seemed to Vere irrational and indelicate; therefore he was bound to seek his information from Mademoiselle Delaforet, who was an unbiassed observer, and had first brought the subject under his notice.

Fortunately for him, he found the old lady at home, and she joined him almost immediately in the salon.

"Ah, Monsieur Danvers, how glad I am that you have returned," she cried, holding out both her hands, with an expression of mingled satisfaction and trepidation.

"Your letter left me no alternative but to hurry back at once," he replied, gravely. "And now I know you will pardon my anxiety to learn the facts of the case before I come face to face with the culprit."

Mademoiselle Delaforet, accustomed to the demonstrativeness of her own countrymen, had expected an outburst of some kind, and had prepared herself to soothe his wrath or assuage his anguish, accordingly as either predominated. But this absence of passion, this judicial calmness of tone and manner, completely mystified her. Did it mean that his anger was too deep for words—that he contemplated some swift and terrible vengeance on his flighty wife and her romantic admirer? She glanced anxiously



into his face, which looked pale and stern in the dim light of the single lamp, and her heart sank within her.

"Perhaps I said too much in my letter," she began, in a quavering voice. "There's no harm really happened, of that be assured, as I am myself—thank God! I only thought that, loving you both as my own children, you ought to be warned of what was going on in your absence."

"To be sure; and what really *has* occurred?" asked Vere, with a shade of impatience. He was cold, tired, and hungry, and anxious to reach home, so that, at the risk of appearing rude, he was determined not to let the old lady digress too much.

"Nothing more than I told you—I swear to you by the Holy Virgin!" she cried, more and more terrified at the tone of condensed savagery which she believed she could detect in his voice and manner. "Monsieur Danvers—dear Monsieur Danvers, I implore you, do nothing rashly. The poor child was thoughtless, and unhappy at your departure, and acted on the impulse of the moment."

It was Vere's turn to feel perplexed. He stared blankly at the speaker, and at the sight of her streaming eyes and ungovernable emotion a terrible thought flashed through his mind, a thought of which he was ashamed as soon as he had given it utterance.

"Good God! Do you mean that Carmen—my wife—has compromised herself with that villain?" he cried, hoarsely, seizing her arm and squeezing it hard in his momentary anguish.

"Oh no, no; I never said that, nor is it true. But you are hurting me, Monsieur Danvers," she replied, in a piteous voice.

Vere instantly relaxed his grasp, and with it the sternness of his features. He raised his hand to his eyes like one waking from a horrible dream, and then, convinced as much by the promptings of his own heart as by Mademoiselle Delaforet's earnest asseverations of the monstrosity of his momentary suspicion, he said, smilingly, "I beg a thousand pardons, dear lady, for my roughness. It seems to me we are frightening each other unnecessarily. Perhaps it is my fault for attempting to hurry you too much. Come, now, I will sit down here quietly, and you shall tell your tale in your own way. It is only another exemplification of the proverb—more haste, less speed."

Relieved by his change of manner, Mademoiselle Mathilde proceeded to narrate more or less succinctly the circumstances of her sister's visit, culminating in the unexpected arrival of the vicomte to dinner.

"It is strange. M. de Malsherbes cannot have received my note; and yet I certainly wrote to him to say that our little party must be postponed, and I brought it with me to post when I came to see you the evening before my departure," observed Vere, pulling out a bundle of letters from his pocket. "Can I have forgotten to do so? By Jove, I did! here it is. It has slipped inside another large envelope, and that accounts for my not discovering my oversight sooner. It appears we have had all our anxiety for nothing, and I might as well have stayed to see my father after all. However, I have only my own stupidity to thank."



"I am very glad you have found that letter; it makes the behavior of M. de Malsherbes less reprehensible," said Mademoiselle Delaforet, quietly. To say truth, the old lady was a little piqued by the extreme cheerfulness with which Vere, in the reaction after his terrible dread, was disposed to view the matter. Although he did not say so in so many words, it suggested that, in his opinion, she had acted on insufficient grounds in bringing him back.

"Less reprehensible, my dear lady! Is there anything wrong in a man turning up to dine when he has been invited? No, the mistake was mine, and I should have felt very foolish if I had accused him of ungentlemanly behavior, as I at first thought of doing."

This defence of his rival roused the spirit of contradiction generally latent in the feminine mind. So long as Carmen was safe, the good lady cared not how it fared with the vicomte, for whom she had contracted an extreme antipathy.

"After all, you would not have been far wrong," she observed; "his intrusion did not end there."

"Indeed!" said Vere, in a tone of patient resignation.

"Indeed, no. He waited till Clarisse had left the chalet, as I could not spare her longer, and then called when your wife was alone."

"Humph! It would certainly have been better taste to have deferred his visit till my return."

"You will think his taste still more questionable when I tell you that it was in the evening, after dinner—and that he has been there every day since, on one pretext or another," said Mademoiselle Delaforet, unable to restrain a tone of triumph.

"But, my dear lady, how do you know all this, since neither you nor your sister were there?" asked Vere, not quite at his ease, but unwilling to allow himself to be again alarmed without good reason.

"Partly from Carmen herself, and partly from one of my maids, whose cousin is in the service of M. de Malsherbes. You may rely upon the truth of what I state. And, indeed, I myself met the vicomte coming out of the chalet three days ago, when I went to urge upon your wife the necessity for circumspection, and to try and persuade her to put a stop to all this scandal by coming to stay here until your return."

"And what did Carmen say?" asked Vere, shortly.

"You are a man of sense, and will know how to make allowances for what is, after all, only the outcome of a fit of girlish temper and obstinacy—otherwise, I should hardly like to tell you—"

"Pray go on—I desire to know all the truth."

"Her reply was, 'If my reputation is in danger, as you say, the fault lies with my husband more than with me. I choose to remain in my own house; I am no longer a child to be ordered from one place to another, and because I am deserted by those whose duty it is to protect me, it is no reason why I should close my door on the only friend who takes pity on my desolate condition.'"

"Silly child, she knows I could not help myself. And who would have thought she would make such a fuss about a few days' ab-



sence?" exclaimed Vere, in a tone of annoyance. "Surely she must see the indelicacy of her proceedings. As for this M. de Malsherbes, I shall have to talk to him seriously."

"Pray be cautious in dealing with him, or you may have a duel on your hands, and that would only make people talk the more."

"Confound them, yes! Whatever comes or goes, they are sure to do that," said Vere, rising to take his departure. "Well, I think the best thing I can do is to make haste home, and try to persuade Carmen into a rational frame of mind. I believe, as you say, that it is nothing but a storm in a teacup, and will soon blow over; but I thank you heartily all the same for your kindly warning."

"Carmen is not like other girls; she is so intense, whether in love or hate, and passion blinds her to everything but the impulse of the moment," said Mademoiselle Delaforet, as she shook hands with him at the door. "However, there is one consolation for both of us. She loves you with her whole heart and soul, of that I am convinced; and all women — and she most of all — can be governed through the heart when everything else fails. Au revoir, cher Monsieur Danvers. I shall look for good news to-morrow."

Vere was half way down to the gate, at which his conveyance was waiting, when the old lady called him back.

"I forgot to mention," she said, in a hurried whisper, "that it will be well to change your servant. Louise has been to the château more than once, closeted with M. de Malsherbes, and I have reason to believe that she has encouraged his visits even if she is not in his pay. Mark my words, that is a dangerous woman."

"Thank you. I think you are right. I never liked her myself. But she was Madame Bouchard's recommendation, and an excellent cook."

"Well, I will try to find you another as good, and without her talent for intrigue. Meanwhile, watch her for yourself."

"I'm afraid a man is no match for a woman at that kind of game," laughed Vere. "But I am keeping you in the damp. How cold it is; good-night, once more."

As the vehicle rattled over the round, knobbly stones, with which the streets of the little town were paved, and after crossing the two bridges, turned to the right, and commenced to ascend the forest track, which led to the chalet, Vere, leaning back against the damp and mouldy-smelling cushions, closed his eyes, and tried to collect his thoughts. What he had just learned might mean a great deal or nothing at all. He inclined to the latter belief, and determined that, in any case, nothing but the most incontrovertible proofs should induce him to doubt, still less to appear to doubt, his wife's honor and affection. He would meet her as though nothing out of the ordinary course of things had happened, leaving it to her to explain or excuse her conduct as and when she thought fit. All the wrath and indignation aroused within him by Mademoiselle Mathilde's narration were directed against M. de Malsherbes. And when he recalled his unblushing attempts to play the Don Juan to his Zerlina, Vere's fingers itched to read him a lesson that he would not easily forget.



But as yet he had no positive proofs that the vicomte had any intention of acting dishonorably. Consequently, he deemed it wiser in his case also to take no immediate steps towards calling him to account. If their neighbor persisted in intruding himself upon them, he should give him clearly to understand that his presence was unwelcome. And if that did not suffice—well, it would be time enough then to translate language into action. And to judge from the thinker's expression and attitude, the action was likely to be sufficiently forcible.

The sudden cessation of the jolting and jerking motion—suggestive of an attempt on the part of the toiling horse to wrench the rickety vehicle asunder—to which, after half an hour's experience, Vere's aching bones were beginning to grow accustomed, brought his meditations to a halt. Peering out into the darkness, he dimly perceived lights burning in a way-side habitation, which proved, on nearer inspection, to be his own. His approach had evidently been heralded by the grinding of the wheels and the furious cracking of the driver's whip, for, as he descended from his torture-chamber, the hall door was thrown open, and there, in a flood of light, cast by the little pendent lamp, augmented by another held by Louise in the background, stood Carmen.

She gave one piercing glance into the outside gloom, and, regardless of cold, rain, and mud, and equally heedless of the presence of the strange coachman, she bounded towards the weary traveller with a soft cry of delight. Then, hanging round his neck, with every demonstration of affection, she murmured tenderly, "You have come back, then, at last, Vere, my darling—my husband!"

For the first time in his existence, Vere forgot his objections to a scene. Doubts, fears, ill-temper, all vanished like night before advancing dawn and the warm kiss of the sun—only that, in this case, his sun shone with a reflected light, and made its sweet caresses *felt* rather than *seen* through the surrounding obscurity. Perhaps that was why this public display of emotion left no sting of shame, and why he, who prided himself on being matter-of-fact and cool-headed so far forgot his tenets as to clasp the tender form closely to his breast and warmly return her embraces.

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"Then you received my telegram and expected me?" asked Vere, awakening to the fact that he was not yet in Paradise, and that there are such things as colds, aches, and pains in store for tender women who affront a winter's night in thin shoes and in-door clothing. "Come, dearest, run in while I settle with the driver."

Carmen obeyed, and when he joined her in the warm *salle-à-manger*, where a cosy little supper was spread for two, and she, with the love-light still dancing in her eyes, and a bright flush of happiness on her cheeks, playfully dragged him into his dressing-room, and ordered him to change his damp clothes before he spoke another word, Vere felt that even terrestrial love and comforts are passing sweet.

By mutual, although tacit consent, that evening was devoted to



the enjoyment of seeing one another again after their short separation. No mention was made by either of the untoward circumstances under which they had parted, nor of the ominous and still unexplained subsequent events which had led to their sudden reunion.

Vere looked in his wife's happy face and dismissed all doubts and suspicions as groundless and unworthy; and she, reading his heart through his eyes, forgot all about Psyche and M. de Malsherbes, or remembered them only to laugh to herself over her dread of a rival and her own abortive schemes of vengeance.

To Louise their joy was as gall and wormwood, and she strove to act like the mummy at the Egyptian feasts by frequently intruding her sour face, and scowling, by turns, warningly at Carmen and menacingly at Vere. But her ill-tempered glances fell unheeded, and when she received her dismissal for the night she retired to bemoan the vanishing prospect of her still unearned reward.

On the following day Vere induced Carmen to accompany him to Boisy-la-Reine, and, although he abominated ceremonious visits, made a point of calling on all their friends and acquaintances, and finished up the afternoon by dining *en tête-à-tête* with his wife in the public room of the Aigle Noir. This seemed to him the quickest and surest method of giving the lie to the various scandals which his abrupt departure and the vicomte's subsequent behavior had set on foot. And indeed he could have adopted no better plan. To begin with, the hotel was the rallying-point of all the gossips of the place, and Madame Bouchard herself, with her ubiquitous interest in and knowledge of the affairs of her neighbors, and extreme delight in publicly displaying her powers of observation, was equal to half a dozen leading articles in the newspapers as a means of authoritatively announcing the perfect accord which existed in the *jeune ménage Anglais*. Vere had always been a favorite of the good lady's, and, although she felt that she owed it to her reputation to be the first to spread the report of their disagreement and of Carmen's flighty conduct, she was none the less glad to be able to announce that all was now well between them.

It goes without saying that kind-hearted Mademoiselle Delaforet was overjoyed at the new complexion Vere's return had given to affairs.

"I told you that the dear child was only fretting at your absence," she whispered triumphantly in Vere's ear, as they were taking their departure. "She's like a flower that only opens its petals in the sun. You are her sun, jeune monsieur, so see that you always shine at the proper time."

"And you the moon to watch over her in the sun's absence, and right well you have done it," Vere smiled reply.

"Have you seen anything of M. de M——?" asked the old lady with a swift glance at Carmen, who was talking to Mademoiselle Clarisse.

"No, not yet. And if he is wise, he will keep out of my way for the present. I don't feel particularly amicably disposed towards him. Apropos of likes and dislikes, have you thought of any one to replace Louise?"



"To be sure I have, but that is not in your department. I will tell your wife. Here Carmen, my dear, Monsieur Danvers tells me that you are not quite satisfied with your servant. Now, I can recommend to you a perfect treasure."

Carmen started, and looked uneasily at her husband. The mention of Louise recalled her own past folly, that she now wished forever banished and forgotten, and, above all, never to be paraded before Vere's eyes. "Did he, after all, suspect something? Was his kindness and apparent contentment only assumed?" This thought brought with it a glimpse of the difficulties which lay before her should she ever be called upon to give an explanation of her conduct. She had allowed herself to be led into a questionable position in the gratification of her momentary anger and spite, and now what proof had she to offer of her innocence beyond her own word? There was, however, no sign of anger or suspicion in Vere's face, so she found courage to reply, although with heightened color and a palpitating heart, "I don't remember saying I wished to change, but, all the same, I think I should be glad to do so. Louise is a good servant in some respects, but—"

"Well, my protégée is a good one in *all*," interrupted Mademoiselle Mathilde, "so we'll regard that as settled. You can give the woman notice to-night when you reach home, and I will tell Marie to hold herself in readiness to take her place as soon as her time is up."

Carmen did not much relish the task before her, for Louise had succeeded in gaining considerable influence over her, the influence of a strong and unscrupulous will over one which, although not weak, was vacillating and fitful. However, she felt that it was Vere's wish, and in her present state of mind there was nothing he could have asked that she was not equal to doing or attempting.

Evidently, Louise was not unprepared for some such turn of events, for when, on the following morning, Carmen informed her that they no longer required her services, she received the intimation in sullen silence. Possibly this was due to the fact that Vere was in the room, and her guilty conscience told her that, if he had known the depths of her intended villany, she would hardly have got off unpunished. Or, she may have reckoned that her grudge against Vere, which the failure of her first attempt to ruin his happiness had only increased, could be better settled when she was out of his service. At any rate, she quitted the apartment without making any of the disclosures which Carmen had more than half dreaded; and she busied herself that afternoon with inditing a long epistle to M. de Malsherbes at Paris, whither he had retired at her suggestion, on the first intimation of Vere's return.

As the consequence of all the unusual excitement of the past few weeks, Carmen was seized with a serious feverish attack, which obliged her to keep her room, and caused Vere no little anxiety. It was altogether so unnatural to see her, who was usually so vivacious and restless, lying, with half-closed eyes, languid and silent, that he conjured up all sorts of exaggerated notions as to the gravity of her



malady, and would not rest satisfied until he had summoned a physician from Paris. "With careful nursing and attention all would be well"—such was the great man's report; and Vere determined that she should lack neither while he was by to look after her. Nor was his devotion thrown away. The pale cheeks soon began to recover their peach-like coloring, and the bright eyes to lose their unnatural brilliancy and restlessness, and to meet his glances of tender solicitude with looks of conscious affection and heartfelt gratitude. By-and-by Carmen was able to sit up in her reclining-chair and watch him painting, or even to listen while he read aloud for her amusement.

Never since the days of their first infatuation had husband and wife been so drawn together, so thoroughly at one, as they were now. Suffering and sympathy had toned down the little asperities and points of friction in both their characters, and each appeared to the other in a fresh and charming light.

The new servant turned out a great success, the Demoiselles Delaforet and Madame Bouchard were unremitting in their kind attentions, and, altogether, this time of illness was far from being one of unhappiness. Of course it prevented Vere from returning to Danverfield as he had intended, but he was kept well posted up in home intelligence by Mrs. Danvers and Psyche, and both assured him that there was no need for anxiety on his father's account, and that he would lose nothing by waiting.

Thus the winter months were speeding quickly by, and Vere hoped that, by deferring his visit until the spring, Carmen would be able to accompany him and plead her own cause in person.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

"The long demurring maid,  
Whose lonely unappropriated sweets  
Smiled like yon knot of cowslips on the cliff,  
Not to be come at by the willing hand."

BLAIR'S *Grave*.

LIEUTENANT HOLDSWORTH had carried away with him a very vivid impression of the charms of Squire Danvers's niece.

Although not given to sentimentalizing, which in others he contemptuously designated as "softness" and "bosh," he found himself perpetually conjuring up before his mind's eye the fair face and graceful figure of Miss Psyche. And so pleasant was this vision to contemplate, that he felt the utmost reluctance to substitute for it the thoughts of daily drill and of awkward squads, of pipe-clay and inspections and field-days, which had hitherto formed his mental pabulum.

He had gone so far as to treasure up the flower which she had bestowed upon him at their last interview, and, in the solitude of his



own room, he not unfrequently drew it from its hiding-place, and shamefacedly lavished upon it admiration and even caresses, which the appearance of the few faded petals and leaves seemed scarcely to warrant.

"I wonder what the deuce has come to me. I've seen lots of pretty girls before, and I've never felt so inclined to make a fool of myself. Jack, my boy, we've often said that matrimony isn't in our line. We must pull ourselves together and shake off this nonsense." Thus he apostrophized himself more than once, but the nonsense declined to be shaken off, and Lieutenant Holdsworth began to get rather nervous about his precious self. He had so long been accustomed to inveigh against matrimony as a "leap in the dark, with a ten-to-one chance of your coming to grief on the other side of the fence," that, to seriously contemplate it for himself, seemed little short of rank apostasy. Then again, although he might discover or manufacture an excuse of sufficient cogency for home consumption, it was quite another affair to have to eat his own words before all his brother-officers after posing as the apostle of celibacy.

This, for a while, seemed his main difficulty. But when the power that laughs at locksmiths, and equally at logicians, asserted itself and led him to steel his heart against prospective gibes and chaff, lo! another awaited him, involving a still further subversion of his preconceived notions and theories. Granted that he, for his part, was willing to sacrifice his dearly-prized freedom, and to trust to his luck and the "off-chance" to land him on his legs, would the incomparable Psyche condescend to favor his suit? That he—the *enfant gâté* of the regiment—young, well-born, good-looking, and with comfortable means, accustomed to be made much of by society, especially by the feminine division, should pause and tremble at the question, was proof positive of the genuineness of his passion. Without being more conceited than the generality of men of his stamp, Jack Holdsworth had been accustomed to regard himself as "a decent sort of fellow," and, from a matrimonial point of view, as "a very good catch"—both of which he undoubtedly was. But true love induces humility, and when the blind god's shaft speeds true, it pierces the outer casing of selfishness and self-content, and fills the stricken heart with a fervent idolism, the converse of which is humbleness of mind and self-distrust.

Now Jack was a man of action, and the question having arisen, and clamoring for a reply, he determined that answered it should be at once in one sense or the other. Accordingly he obtained a fortnight's leave, and promptly transported himself and his hunters to his uncle's residence in the neighborhood of Danverfield. Christmas was at hand, and he found the Grange full of visitors, a circumstance on which he had not counted, and with which, in his present state of mind, he would willingly have dispensed.

"Delighted to see you, my boy," cried Mr. Bolton, who had driven over to the station to meet his nephew. "But you'll have to put up with indifferent quarters. We never dreamed of you coming till we received your note yesterday, and your aunt and the girls, between



them, have packed the old place pretty nearly full with their London friends. However, we can manage a shake-down for you somewhere; and thank goodness there's lots of stable room."

"To tell the truth, I forgot all about its being Christmas; and finding the chief in an amiable mood, I thought I might as well screw another week's leave out of him. Then, having done the trick, it occurred to me that I couldn't do better than run down here for a change. One gets tired of always hunting in the same country," said Jack, hypocritically.

"Well, as I said before, we're right glad you're come. The more the merrier. You'll be a godsend to the girls, for they've invited no end of town belles, and they're a sort of bell that wants constant ringing, or they get out of tune."

"That's not much in my line," said Jack, gloomily. "I've come for the hunting."

"Oh yes. I know all about that. You young fellows of the present day think it the correct thing to turn up your noses at female society, and pretend you don't know a pretty face when you see it. Fact is, you're a set of conceited young puppies, and afraid of letting yourselves go too cheap. Sport, indeed. Where can you get better sport than in the company of a charming girl? You should do as we used in my young days—combine the worship of Diana with that of Venus."

"That's all very well; but women can't shoot, and they're generally in the way in the hunting-field—at least most of them," replied Master Jack, with a mental reservation in favor of Psyche Danvers.

"That's a pretty speech for a young buck wearing her Majesty's uniform. But you'll find your hunting cut short, at least as regards the harriers. You heard of poor old Danvers's accident?"

"Yes; Compton told me of it, and I saw it in the *Field*—six weeks ago. I suppose I must go over and call, as he entertained me last time I was here," said Jack, carelessly.

"You can do as you like about that; though I can't say I admire your taste if you prefer the society of that old bear to that you'll find at the house. We've done the polite in sending over, but hang me if I'd care to tackle Bruin personally, particularly now that he's got a sore head to sweeten his temper," replied Mr. Bolton, who, like most of the neighboring gentry, had a wholesome dread of the old squire's biting tongue and uncompromising habit of calling a spade a spade—if nothing plainer.

"He's a regular old curiosity, and that's why I like him. Then he's a rare good sportsman, and it seems rough on the old gentleman to be knocked off his hunting like that," said Jack, still speaking half truths.

"Well, if he's an old curiosity, you're a young one. But here we are, with just half an hour to dress for dinner," exclaimed Mr. Bolton, pulling up the steaming horses. "Jump down, my boy. Walker will show you your room. Mind every hair is in place, for you'll be the cynosure of many pairs of bright eyes in the drawing-room. That's what it is to have a reputation as a dandy and a lady-killer."



Jack laughed as he followed the portly butler into the hall, but made no reply; and Mr. Bolton, shaking his head gravely, threw the reins to his groom and slowly mounted the steps after his nephew.

"There's something wrong with that boy, or else with our present system of education," he muttered. "When I was his age, I shouldn't have talked of leaving a house full of pretty girls to call on a crusty old invalid."

But then Mr. Bolton didn't know all the facts of the case.

The next morning there was a handy meet of Lord L——'s foxhounds, and young Holdsworth appeared at the breakfast-table in the full glory of pink coat, shining boots, and immaculate tops and leathers, a glory which was shared in, although to a lesser extent, by several of the other guests.

Jack secretly hoped that some of the Danverfield party would be out—possibly even Miss Psyche herself; and he wasn't best pleased at the thought of their meeting being witnessed by all these people, particularly as some of the ladies expressed their intention of following the chase, and one had even done him the honor of selecting him for her pilot. As in duty bound, he bowed graciously and expressed his extreme delight; but inwardly he groaned, "I know what that means. She'll stick to me all day like a leech, and if she doesn't succeed in jumping on me, will come to grief herself in the middle of the run, and spoil the day for both of us."

However, neither his joyous anticipations nor his gloomy forebodings were destined to come to pass. Psyche was not out, and his fair companion proved to be a good horsewoman, and neither "rode jealous" nor recklessly, but acquitted herself most reputably, considering that she was steering a strange horse over a strange country. And well was it for her that she knew what she was about, and was on a safe mount, for the young man, disappointed in his expectation of meeting his inamorata, rode harder and straighter than was consistent with his duty as pilot, and even forgot to turn his head to see if his charge was able to negotiate the formidable obstacles over which he occasionally led her.

They had a good forty minutes and a pretty kill, and while the crisp morning air was still resounding with the "whoo-whoop—tear him up!" of the huntsman and whips, Jack espied Charlie Danvers among the favored few who were in at the death.

Instantly his countenance lightened, and he rode up to Psyche's brother with a cordial greeting.

"Where did you spring from?" he asked; "I did not see you at the meet."

"No, I was rather late, but just nicked in as you were going away from the gorse. Capital spin, wasn't it? Our hounds haven't been out since the old gentleman's accident, so I haven't had so much of this sort of thing as usual this season," said Charlie, patting his steed's reeking neck.

"I suppose not. But can't you get to this pack pretty easily?"

"They meet within range two days a week, as a rule; but I've



had my hands so full that I haven't been able to spare more than an occasional day."

"That's rough. How is the squire getting on? And your—all your people?"

"As well as can be expected, thanks. But he'll never be the same man again, and I am afraid he'll have to give up the harriers. The doctors say his brain is affected, and certainly he has not recovered his memory."

"I am sorry to hear that. I thought of riding over to see him one day before I leave."

"Do. You'll find him considerably altered. He looks quite the old man, and, strange to say, the fall seems to have knocked the bad temper out of him. He hardly ever swears now, even at me," said Charlie, laughing.

"That's a bad sign, but it decides me to pay him a visit. I promised Compton I'd bring him the latest news. Is your sister still with you? I suppose not, as she isn't out to-day," said Jack, bending down to knock a lump of mud off one of his spurs.

"Yes, she and the governor and mater are all here for Christmas; but she doesn't like to leave the old man. He's never happy when she's out of his sight. I suppose you're putting up at the Grange?"

"Yes, and we've got a houseful of people, mostly of the fair sex—worse luck. A man feels so awfully tied with a pack of girls to entertain. By-the-way, that reminds me, I'm supposed to have one under my wing now. Where the deuce has she flown to? Oh, there she is talking to Talbot. That's a mercy; he'll keep her off my hands for the rest of the day. There's nothing he likes better than dancing attendance on a petticoat."

On the termination of the day's sport Jack found himself within two or three miles of Danverfield; so, after arranging with the gallant captain about the safe escort of his fair charge, whom he himself had so shamefully neglected, he jogged on with Charlie Danvers to pay his promised visit.

He found the squire seated in an invalid-chair near the fire in his own particular sanctum, and at his feet, on a low stool, reclined Psyche, book in hand.

As the two young men entered the room the girl sprang up, crying, eagerly, "Well, Charlie, what sort of day have you had?" Then peering through the gathering darkness at the second intruder, she exclaimed, "Why, it's Mr. Holdsworth. This is an unexpected pleasure."

As she turned her face towards him, and held out her hand by way of welcome, Jack gazed earnestly on the features that had so deeply impressed themselves on his heart. "Very kind of you to say so, I'm sure," he replied, gayly; then added, in a lower tone, "I wish I was sure that you mean it."

"I never say anything that I don't mean—at least, hardly ever," said Psyche; and, as she spoke, the flickering flame just lighted up her cheek, and for the moment Jack almost believed that she was blushing.



What a charm there is in a maiden's blush, particularly when we can flatter ourselves that it is called forth by delight at our presence. Though, if we only knew how often it arises from mere surprise, or self-consciousness, or even from the secret knowledge of some little defect in her toilet, which our unexpected appearance leaves her no time to remedy, we should be less ready to lay the flattering unction to our souls, and less surprised when our charmer turns out to be in love only with herself, or, at any rate, not with us. But then, if everybody were wise, and knew the exact ins and outs of everybody else's character, what a very matter-of-fact, unromantic world this would be!

Be that as it may, Jack Holdsworth felt a thrill of unreasoning delight, and kept the soft little hand in his longer than a merely formal greeting demanded. "I hoped you would have been out with us to-day, for I wanted to hear how your uncle was progressing. Your brother told me I should find you here, so I thought I would seek information at headquarters," he remarked, somewhat inconsequently.

"Well, here is my uncle to answer for himself," replied Psyche, gently withdrawing from his grasp. "Uncle, dear, this is Mr. Holdsworth, who hunted with us and dined here two or three months ago. He has kindly called in on purpose to see you."

Jack fancied he could detect a malicious intonation in these last words; but he contented himself with casting a reproachful glance towards her, which was probably lost in the darkness, and advanced to greet the invalid.

"Mr. Holdsworth! I don't seem to remember the name; but then my memory's rather shaky," said the squire, in a voice of feeble petulance. "Ring for the lamps, my dear, so that we all can see one another. Anyhow, it's very kind of him to call."

"Not at all. I assure you I was most anxious to hear how you were. I have not forgotten the kindness you showed me; besides, I promised Compton," replied Jack, heartily.

"Well, I hear you've had a good day's sport. I wonder how long it will be before I am in the saddle again. Ah! here are the lights. Psyche, my dear, tell them to bring in some refreshment for these gentlemen. I hope some one is looking after your horses."

"Yes, thanks; we took them round to the stables and saw them gruelled before we came in."

"That's right; always see to your beast yourself. It's the least a man can do after being safely carried through a good run."

"Or a woman either," joined in Psyche. "I always used to give Norah her gruel myself when I got home—dear old pet."

"When are you coming out again, Miss Danvers?" asked Jack, with an eye to business.

"Oh, I don't know; soon, I hope, when uncle is quite well and can spare me."

"I can spare you now, child, if you like to go. You've never said you wanted to hunt all this time, and I thought you wouldn't care to go among strangers without me."



"But Miss Danvers won't be among strangers if she comes out with us on Thursday. There'll be her brother and myself to look after her, and a large party of ladies from my uncle's," interposed Jack, eagerly.

"Where do they meet?"

"At Whip's-cross—about eight miles from here."

"I know; bless the boy. Well, it's a nice open country, and a gallop won't do the mare any harm. What do you say, Psyche?"

"I should like to go immensely, if you are quite sure you can spare me," cried Psyche, her eyes sparkling with anticipated pleasure.

"Spare you, child? Why, there's nothing the matter with me now. Only you women are so fond of coddling and nursing, that when you get a man down you sit on his head, and try your best to kill him with kindness."

And so, much to Jack's delight, before he mounted his horse to jog back to the Grange it was settled that he should call for Psyche and her brother on his way to the next trysting-place of Lord H——'s hounds.

That evening young Holdsworth was the life and soul of the party at the Grange. Even the fair damsel whom he had treated so cavalierly, in the ungallant sense of the word, and who had confided to her friends that he was a dull, unmannered boor, was bound to admit that he could be agreeable and amusing when he chose—an admission not a little galling to her self-conceit; while the non-riding division of the male visitors who had been expending their attentions and devotions unremittingly on behalf of the ladies during the whole day, were entirely out of the hunt—snuffed out by this lordly young spark, who had hitherto displayed a callous indifference to the charms of their society, and only now exerted himself to please as a means of working off his own elation. Such is life!

Thursday arrived, and Jack stole stealthily away before the others, to avoid being told off as escort for any of the fair pursuers starting from his uncle's house. He had made up his mind to propose to Psyche that very day, and his brain was full of schemes for securing a favorable opportunity.

He regarded as good omens the bright smile with which she greeted him, and the friendly and almost familiar chat in which she joined as the trio trotted steadily on to the meet. And when he hesitatingly suggested that, as he knew that side of the country better than she did, she should allow him to be her pilot, her willing assent filled him with elation.

During the first part of the day he felt that he owed it to her love of the sport and his own reputation that she should figure in the first flight. Accordingly, he cut out the work in a business-like manner, wasting no breath in words, nor time in needless gallantries, and had the satisfaction of sharing her delight when she witnessed the successful termination of a "really good thing." Honor and his appetite for a good gallop being satisfied, the voice of love began to make itself heard, and Master Jack was on the alert for a



chance of unburdening his feelings, and of circumventing a quarry more shy, elusive, and wary than the cunningest fox that ever broke covert—a young girl's heart.

All is fair in love and war; and Jack, acting on this maxim, deliberately led his companion away from the rest of the field, on the plea of avoiding a dirty ride through a big covert which the hounds had just begun to draw.

"Come along, Miss Danvers," he cried, cantering off, so as to leave her no time for argument. "I know a short cut through to the point where the fox is sure to break."

Nothing doubting, Psyche followed, and soon the two were engaged in a narrow foot-track skirting the wood.

"It may be a short cut, and it may be less dirty than the other rides, but nobody else seems to share your opinion," said Psyche, laughing and looking back. "And I don't wonder at it if they have any respect for their faces and hats. We shall be torn to pieces by the time we get through."

"It's better riding a little farther along, and if you'll follow quite close behind me, I'll break a way through for you and keep the branches out of your face," replied Jack, gallantly plunging on.

Psyche did as she was bid, and emerged from the thicket without much damage. But her companion was in a sorry plight, for, to save her, he had to sacrifice himself, and his face and hat were covered with wheals and scratches.

"I should think you must be glad that that performance is over," laughed Psyche, riding up beside him as the track opened into a wider clearing. "Poor man! I declare you're a mass of wounds."

The tone of commiseration just gave Jack's courage the necessary fillip for springing the mine that would either waft him into regions of untold bliss, or blast and disperse his hopes of happiness.

"Miss Danvers, I have something to tell you," he began, with manifest agitation. To face the possibility of a refusal seemed worse to him now than charging a masked battery.

"After all this painful preparation, it ought to be something extra agreeable," replied the girl, turning towards him with a mischievous smile, which faded quickly away as her eyes met his, and she read in them the passion that was struggling to find vent for itself in language.

"Psyche! dearest Psyche, will you listen to me patiently while I try to make you understand how deeply—"

"Oh, Mr. Holdsworth, please don't. I think I know what you want to say; and it's no use. Pray, pray let us ride on, or we shall lose the hounds," she said, in a voice of gentle entreaty.

"I can't help it! I must speak—Psyche, I love you! I can't tell you how much—but I can't live without you."

The girl trembled slightly, and averted her head. There was no mistaking the manly fervor and earnestness of his tone. But she replied firmly, though gently, "I'm so sorry; but what you wish cannot be."



"What do you mean? Can't you like me; or do you doubt the truth of my love?"

"I like you very much, and I believe all you say, but I don't love you."

"Oh, Psyche, have pity on me. If you like me, surely I may hope that one day—"

"It's no use. It really is no use; and I wish I could have spared you this."

"Spare me a little of your love. Do, darling; anything just to keep me from despair," he cried, emboldened by the tender pity that shone in her eyes, moist with unshed tears.

"Please don't ask me any more. It pains me to have to refuse you. But you must know that love—love as I understand it, and such as your love deserves—cannot be forced, even by liking or pity, unless it already exists. You will find plenty of girls worthier than I am, and some day you will thank me for this."

"Never! I swear I never have loved, and never shall love, any woman but you."

"We all think that at first, and sometimes it is true—with our sex."

Jack fired up at this. "It is true with me, and you have no right to doubt my honor. Put me to any test you like."

"I'll grant that you're the exception. Indeed, I didn't mean to doubt your word for a moment. I only wished to console you."

"There's only one way of doing that," said Jack, vehemently.

"And that I cannot adopt," replied the girl, sadly. "Come, we have made each other unhappy enough for one day. Don't let us lose our chance of sport."

"One moment! Answer me one question, and I'll plague you no more. Do you love anybody else?"

"I don't think you've any right to ask such a question," she said, flushing up to the roots of her hair.

"I don't ask it as a right, but as an act of mercy on your part."

Psyche pondered a minute, and replied, in a low voice, "I can hardly give you an answer; you wouldn't understand. But this much I will tell you—I have made up my mind never to marry at all."

"That's negative consolation. But such as it is I accept it; and I shall make up my mind to do the same until you have changed yours," said Jack, decidedly. Then, as Psyche made no reply beyond a gentle—and as it pleased him to imagine—slightly dubious shake of her head, he added, in a more cheerful tone, "Meanwhile I must content myself with your friendship. You won't deprive me of that, will you?"

"Certainly not; if you think it worth the keeping on these terms," she replied, her face lighting up with an arch smile. "But mind, it engages me to nothing, nor you either. We are to be friends and nothing more."

"A sort of armed neutrality, eh? Very well, I agree. Give me your hand on the pact."



The girl raised her eyes to his, and frankly held out her hand.

"Thank you," said Jack, bending down, and before she could divine his intention, respectfully pressing it with his lips. "And now to find the hounds!"

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## CHAPTER XXII.

"What reed was that on which I leant?

Ah, backward fancy, wherefore wake

The old bitterness again, and break

The low beginnings of content."—TENNYSON.

EVEN before he had made Carmen's acquaintance M. de Malsherbes had been accustomed to regard himself as a much ill-used mortal. But then his grievance had been against mankind in general and Fate in particular, and he had derived a certain gloomy satisfaction from the reflection that, by hiding the light of his countenance from his fellow-men, he was amply avenging himself upon them, while in his hermit-like seclusion he could bid defiance to the fickle goddess. Like a chrysalis, he was self-contained, and interposed a hard, dry covering of insensibility between his inner self and the interests and concerns of the world around him. If this was not happiness, at any rate it passed for contentment.

But now all that was changed. Allured by the sunshine of woman's beauty, he had ventured to burst his bonds, and, finding the warmth and light pleasant to bask in, had determined to shake off his deathlike letbargy and start existence afresh in the guise of a gay butterfly. Carmen was at once the means and the end of this fresh outburst of vital energy. She was his sunny flower-garden beyond whose boundaries he felt no desire to roam. To flutter about her, lost in admiration of her beauty, to taste the sweet nectar from her lips or listen to the music of her voice, was his new ideal of happiness.

And then, to think that he was shut out from this paradise and cut off from all that made life worth living by the mere accident that she belonged to another, was simply maddening. For the first few months of their acquaintanceship, and during Vere's absence in England, the vicomte had flattered himself that Carmen reciprocated his passion, and, with a fatuity which was almost sublime in its intensity, he was disposed to regard the obstructive husband with a certain degree of pity and indulgence.

On Vere's return he had quitted the château, not so much to avoid his rival as to spare Carmen the embarrassment of meeting her lover in the presence of her husband. True, the result of his intercourse with his bewitching neighbor had not been so satisfactory as he had anticipated. But he construed the skilful manner in which she had parried his attacks as a mere feminine artifice for saving appear-



ances and for proving the strength of his attachment before taking the irrevocable step that would leave her at his mercy.

When, therefore, he heard from Louise that the young couple had adjusted their differences, his despair and anger knew no bounds.

His first impulse was to return to Boisy-la-Reine at once for the purpose of challenging his enemy to mortal combat. However, such reflection as he was capable of in his then excited state told him that to kill her husband, until he was assured that she was prepared to transfer her affections to himself, would only land him in a worse plight than ever. Then, too, there was always the possibility that he might fall before his adversary's weapon; and little as he cared for life without Carmen, death would scarcely help him to her.

Accordingly, he acted on the advice of his confederate, who promised, if he would remain quietly in Paris, to keep him informed of all that happened, and to give him the first intimation of anything likely to render the prosecution of his design practicable. "It is no longer with me a mere question of reward," she wrote, "but of revenge. Our Englishman, who has always detested me, has induced madame to turn me away; and she, like the chicken-hearted creature that she is, has told me that she no longer requires my services. Very good; then I offer them to you. I understand from Monsieur Bernard that there is a vacancy at the château. I will fill it, and you need not fear but that I shall find an opportunity of earning my wages." To this tempting offer the vicomte sent a favorable reply, and when Louise quitted the chalet it was to the château that she directed her steps.

Meanwhile the months rolled on, winter had sped away, and the forest was beginning to assume its robes of spring verdure, and still the conspirators waited and longed in vain for some chance of getting Carmen into their power. Nothing occurred to disturb the conjugal harmony that reigned at the chalet. Vere worked at his easel industriously, but contrived, nevertheless, to devote himself assiduously to the care and entertainment of his young wife, who was beginning to comprehend that love is not necessarily cold or dormant because it is not always indulging in romantic rhapsodies and noisy self-assertion. Her jealous fit had completely vanished, and although she had not renewed her correspondence with Psyche, and still carefully avoided any reference to M. de Malsherbes and his prolonged absence from the château, it was rather from shame at her past folly than from any dread of a rival in her husband's affections, or desire to allow any one to supplant him in hers. She had even brought herself to take a lively interest in the picture on which Vere was lavishing his utmost care and skill with a view to its admission to the forth-coming exhibition of the Royal Academy. And he, delighted by this newly developed sympathy with his favorite pursuit, did all in his power to heighten it by taking her into his confidence as regards his secret aims and ambition.

"You see, dearest, I want to prove to my father that I have not mistaken my vocation and turned out a total failure, as he seemed to anticipate. And to have a picture hung at Burlington House



will bring it home to his mind better than half a dozen foreign diplomas of merit. The old gentleman has a supreme contempt for everything un-English."

"Unless they are blind, they will not only accept your work, but offer it the place of honor," cried Carmen, leaning her head against her husband's shoulder under pretence of viewing the *chef-d'œuvre* in a proper light.

Vere laughed merrily as he pressed a kiss on her upturned face. "I can't expect them to see it with your eyes, you little mass of prejudice. I declare, in your way, you are almost as bad as my father."

"Then I think I shall like him if his weakness takes the same form as mine."

"And that is?" asked Vere, smiling.

"Loving and admiring a certain great artist. I will not name him for fear you should become too vain," said the girl, in a half whisper. The only reply Vere vouchsafed to this pleasant flattery was a deprecating shake of the head and a caressing movement of his hand over her shining hair. Presently Carmen resumed, "I wish I had a mother and father to share my joys. How proud I should be to inform them that their little Carmen had become the wife of a man whose name will soon be known all over Europe. It is pleasant to shine, even if the light be only reflected."

"Poor child! I think it was that which first drew me to you. It seemed so sad to see you all alone in the world, with nobody whose protection you could claim as a right," said Vere, gently.

"I do not remember my mother; she died when I was quite a little girl, out in South America, so I did not miss her so much. But my poor father, I was always with him and loved him so dearly. Do you know, Vere, I sometimes fancy that he is not dead, and that I shall see him again;" and she lifted her moist eyes to her husband's, as though seeking for confirmation of her hope.

Vere felt puzzled what to say. Never before had Carmen spoken thus openly of her past life, and he, respecting her silence and fearing to arouse unhappy memories, had carefully avoided all reference to it. He had formed his own theories as to the cause of the mysterious disappearance of Señor Mendes, founded on inquiries that he had instituted when he was in Paris before his marriage, but he scarcely liked to impart them to Carmen, who still held his memory in loving reverence. Yet, on the other hand, it seemed cruel to encourage hopes that would probably never be realized. He chose a middle course. "It seems hardly likely that if your father is alive, he would have remained silent all these years; still, stranger things have happened. He was engaged in some political intrigue, I am told, and it may have been necessary, for the sake of his personal safety, that he should disappear for a while."

"How do you know all this?" asked Carmen, breathlessly.

"I called on Monsieur Bergeron, his agent in Paris, and he told me all he knew."

"I thought there was something of the kind, because we so often



moved from place to place quite suddenly. And my father was visited by all sorts of strange-looking men."

"Well, at any rate, you will have soon a father and a mother to pet and love you, and sisters into the bargain. When I return from London, whether my picture is accepted or not I shall take you with me to Danverfield, and if all goes well we will make our home in England among my people," said Vere, cheerily.

"I hope they will like me. Do you think they will, Vere?" she asked, with a coquettish smile.

"I defy them to help it. And if they don't make you happy over there, we have always ourselves to fall back upon," Vere replied, resuming his work, while Carmen sank into a chair at his side, and sat pensively watching him until he laid aside his brushes for the day and summoned her for a stroll through the darkening forest before dinner.

Although Louise carefully avoided obtruding herself upon her late employers, she managed to keep herself well posted up as to all their movements. A clever diplomatist, and amiable enough when it suited her purpose, she had pretended to conceive an ardent friendship for her successor at the chalet. Consequently, she was soon aware of Vere's intention of journeying to London with his precious picture in April, and of returning for the purpose of escorting his wife to Danverfield when the summer was more advanced. Here was the opportunity for which she had waited. For although she was woman enough to know that Carmen, happy in her husband's love, was not likely to encourage any further philandering on the part of M. de Malsherbes, still a fortress deprived of its garrison may fall by a *coup-de-main*, however stoutly barricaded its portals.

This news the woman deemed of sufficient importance to merit a personal interview with her master. Accordingly, the day before the date fixed for Vere's departure, Louise took train to Paris with the intention of rousing the vicomte to immediate action. Whatever her failings, want of fixity of purpose was not one of them. The hungering after a competency, and the persistency that bends everything to the attainment of its object, which is characteristic of the French peasant, was combined in her with an utter disbelief in virtue in her own sex, and a rankling sense of personal wrongs, which she hoped to requite on the other. Vere and Carmen had become the special objects of her hate, and to destroy their happiness she was prepared to go all lengths consistent with her own interests.

M. de Malsherbes had taken up his abode in an unfashionable and unsavory hotel in the Quartier Latin. Here, amid the hubbub and turmoil of student life, he was unrecognized and safe from observation. He passed for a chairless professor, an unread poet, or a correspondent of a provincial newspaper at ten centimes a line. So long as he paid his modest rent, weekly in advance, he was free to come and go, sleep or idle, feast or starve, without hinderance or comment. This life, dreary and uninteresting as it would have seemed in his younger days, when he affectioned the world of fashion, possessed a strange charm for him now. He loved to fancy himself a second



Haroun al Raschid, wandering in disguise among the people, or a political refugee hiding from the secret police, according as the romantic or the mysterious mood predominated. Undoubtedly his fruitless passion for Carmen had further unhinged a mind already rusted up with morbid imaginings and creaking from disuse. He spent most of his days in-doors writing verses, and wandered forth after dusk enveloped in a long, black cloak, like a stage conspirator. The Boulevard St. Michel and the Jardin du Luxembourg were his favorite promenades, and he rarely crossed the Pont St. Michel to enter the more fashionable *quartiers*. The acute agonies of the love-fever which he had suffered during the previous autumn were fast grouping themselves in his memory as a series of romantic tableaux, in which he, the Don Quixote of the Nineteenth Century, had gracefully figured beside his peerless Dulcinea del Toboso, or as subject-matter for endless odes, in which Carmen and Hymen stood in rhyming juxtaposition.

The unexpected appearance of Louise with the startling intelligence that his goddess was once more a tangible reality—a golden apple in the garden of the Hesperides, with the dragon removed—dazed and bewildered him.

"You say she will be alone—unprotected; but what of that? I cannot force her to love me. You deceived me once before, and I only met with a cruel rebuff. Better let me worship in peace at a distance," he cried, pacing the apartment with agitation.

"Monsieur, then, has altered his mind? He no longer cares for this beautiful creature, about whom he raved a short while ago," said Louise, with a contemptuous smile.

"Not at all. I love her more madly than ever. But what is the use of striving after the unattainable?"

"There is no such word where a woman is concerned and a man who has the courage to use his power."

"But she will not receive me, and I can't drag her here by force."

"Perhaps not; but I can bring her to you of her own free-will."

"Impossible! How would you do it? You told me yourself that she loves her husband."

"How do you catch a mouse? Not by running after it yourself, but by setting a trap and baiting it skilfully."

M. de Malsherbes sighed and shook his head incredulously. "Supposing even she falls into your trap, what then? You know how proud and passionate she is. Look how she treated me when last I had her in my power. She would never yield to force, and her heart is dead to love for me."

"But not to pity. Listen. Write her a letter as I will dictate; intrust it to me, and see if I do not bring her to your side."

"I do not understand; but I will do as you advise."

Louise smiled triumphantly. "Simply write, 'Your cruelty has broken my heart. I am dying for love of you. If you have one particle of pity and regret for the man whose life has been destroyed by your influence, give him the opportunity of bidding you a last



farewell, and of assuring you of his forgiveness and unalterable devotion.”

“I have written it, but I doubt if that will induce her to quit her home,” said the vicomte, dubiously.

“We shall see. I will take this myself, and tell her that you are on your death-bed, too ill to move. She is vain, romantic, and credulous as any school-girl. The belief that she has caused your illness will utterly unnerve her, and she will feel bound to offer what reparation she can, particularly as she can do it without much risk—in her husband’s absence.”

“When does he start?”

“To-morrow, I understand, and she is to stay at the Pension Delaforet while he is away, though I doubt if she will move for a day or two.”

“She will never forgive me when she discovers the ruse,” remarked M. de Malsherbes, biting the end of his pen with a dolorous expression of countenance.

“Courage, M. le Vicomte. I’ll guarantee that she will not only forgive, but adore you. Women forgive their lovers everything but indifference.”

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

“The web of our life is of a mingled yarn,  
Good and ill together.”—SHAKESPEARE.

ONCE again Vere had started on a solitary expedition to his native land. This time, however, it was with Carmen’s ready consent and approval, and she accompanied her husband to the station and smiled her adieux through the tears which even this temporary separation called to her eyes.

Contrasting their present affectionate leave-taking with his previous departure, Vere felt that he had every reason to be thankful for the “change that had come over the spirit of his dreams.” *Then* the sun of his wedded happiness seemed to have set forever; *now* it was at its zenith, and he could conceive of no possibility by which any but passing clouds could arise to dim its cheering brightness. By what means he had at length succeeded in striking the key-note that had awakened Carmen’s sympathies and set them atune with his own, he could not precisely tell; whether he had bent to her or she had raised herself to him, still remained a metaphysical puzzle. But the fact was indisputable that in the past few months they had grown nearer to each other, not only in heart but in thought, and in that community of interest which enables man and wife to conjugate the verb “to love” in all its tenses and moods.

To add to his contentment at this happy solution of the domestic problem were the high hopes which he entertained for the success of his picture. All his artist friends who had seen it pronounced it a work of exceptional merit, and a dealer in Paris had even proposed



to purchase it, in the event of his failing to obtain a more favorable offer among his compatriots, on terms that were as flattering to his pride as they might prove advantageous to his pocket. Then, too, the news from Danverfield was most reassuring. His father, while still remaining more or less of an invalid, had partially recovered his memory, and with it the desire to be reconciled to his exiled son. Indeed, he had gone so far as to sign a letter written by Psyche at his dictation, inviting Vere and his wife to spend the summer in Yorkshire.

Trite as the saying is that perfect happiness is not for this world, it is a truism that the favorites of the sorry jade are apt to forget or overlook. And wisely, perhaps, for why should we damp the delight of our few short hours of bliss by gloomy anticipations of disasters which possibly it is not in our power to avert?

Be that as it may, whether wise or foolish, Vere sped on his journey in high spirits, and in happy ignorance of the thunderbolt that was about to fall from the smiling and cloudless heavens.

\* \* \* \* \*

It had been arranged that, on the afternoon following Vere's departure, Carmen should quit the lonely chalet, and take up her abode during his absence at her old home, the Pension Delaforet.

Mademoiselle Mathilde, having occupied herself busily during the morning in preparing a chamber of honor for her adopted daughter, now sat anxiously awaiting her arrival.

Presently a vehicle drove up and stopped outside the *grille*.

"Tell the coachman to drive in. It will be easier for bringing in the luggage," cried Mademoiselle Delaforet to her sister Clarisse, who was speeding down the garden to receive their visitor.

Clarisse nodded assent, but stopped outside, apparently parleying with the driver, who had descended from the box, and made no sign of obeying the injunction.

Mademoiselle Mathilde grew impatient. She was accustomed to prompt obedience, and could not understand why her sister should stand listening to the coachman instead of assisting Carmen to alight.

"What is the matter? Why don't you let the dear child come in?" she cried, advancing towards them.

Clarisse turned to meet her sister with a face expressive of the deepest anxiety. "Carmen has not come," she gasped; "she has taken the train for Paris with a gentleman, and has sent you this note."

Mademoiselle Mathilde felt her heart stand still with a sudden dread, but, mindful of her own dignity and of Carmen's reputation, she mastered her emotion. "Oh! one of Monsieur Danvers's friends, I suppose," she replied, faintly; and, telling the driver to wait, directed her steps to her private sitting-room.

Once free from observation, the old lady tore open the note with trembling fingers and read as follows: "I am so sorry to disappoint you, but I am called to Paris on urgent business; will explain all later. Carmen."



"Oh, mon Dieu, mon Dieu! what has she done? the unhappy child!" she cried, sinking into a chair, and burying her face in her hands. Much as she loved Carmen, she had all along been disposed to place a more serious construction on her flirtation with M. de Malsherbes than Vere had done, and to her methodical and well-ordered mind, the girl's renunciation of her folly and reconciliation with her husband had seemed too sudden and miraculous to be genuine and enduring. Nevertheless, the blow fell with crushing force, and tender pity strove in her heart with virtuous indignation as she pictured to herself the terrible consequences of this fresh act of madness.

A gentle tap at the door, followed by the entrance of her youngest sister, roused her to the necessity for prompt action. "Clarisse," she exclaimed in a hoarse voice, "I can trust you. You will not betray the poor child's guilty secret until we have exhausted all hope of saving her. Read this."

Mademoiselle Clarisse glanced through the hastily-scrawled epistle, and shook her head sadly. "I feared as much," she said, "from what the coachman told me. But oh, what can have impelled her to this wickedness? How will her husband ever forgive her?"

"Listen, child. It is no use wasting precious time in vain regrets. The question is, how to bring her back before it is too late. I must start for Paris at once," said Mademoiselle Mathilde, decisively.

"But, my sister, there is no train for two hours, and you do not know where to seek her when you get there."

"Stay; Louise, that viper, is at the château, and she knows the vicomte's address. I will drive there at once and wring it from her at any cost."

"Let me go with you."

"No, I will go alone. The absence of two of us at once would give rise to strange surmises in the town. So far all is safe, and unless she was remarked at the station, the gossips may think that I have only gone to spend the evening with her."

"But the driver?"

"He is only a man. There is nothing to fear from him. If necessary, I will make it worth his while to hold his tongue. What did he actually say had happened?"

"Simply this—that on the way here the carriage was stopped by a tall man, muffled in a long cloak, who was evidently expected by Carmen, as she invited him to take a seat beside her, and bade the coachman drive to the station instead of here."

"All planned beforehand! That makes it so much the worse," cried Mademoiselle Delaforet, despairingly. "How can the good God have created so vile a nature in so perfect a form?"

"Hélas! And this time she had not even the excuse of jealousy. No lover could have been more attentive and amiable than Monsieur Danvers has been since his return. In her condition, too, it is incomprehensible and inexcusable."

"Hush, my sister. Let not us, who have never been subjected to



the temptations to which great beauty and strong passions are liable, judge her too harshly," cried the elder lady, who could not bear to hear her favorite spoken ill of by others, however much she herself might deem her worthy of reprobation. "And now bring me my bonnet and mantle, and be sure you say nothing of all this to Hortense till my return."

Clarisse obeyed her sister's behests with the promptitude gotten of long custom, and a few minutes later Mademoiselle Delaforet entered the vehicle and ordered the coachman to drive her with all speed to Beaurivage.

"Tell Hortense, when she comes in, that Madame Danvers has gone to Paris on her husband's business, and has written to ask me to await her return at the chalet," she called out to Clarisse, for the benefit of the driver and of her own maid, who was standing by, all eyes and ears. Then, beckoning to her sister to come close, she whispered in her ear, "I shall spend this evening in gaining what information I can; and to-morrow I shall start for Paris by the first train. Do not be uneasy on my account, and do not expect me till you see me. Above all, pray the Holy Virgin that I may bring our lost sheep back with me. Adieu."

Arrived at Beaurivage, after engaging the carriage for the morning Mademoiselle Mathilde proceeded to interrogate the astonished servant as to Carmen's proceedings subsequent to her husband's departure.

She learned that on the preceding evening Louise had called to see her former mistress, and had been closeted with her for some time. "After her departure," said the woman, "madame seemed very much out of temper and unhappy. I heard her exclaim that she had brought this insult on herself, and regret that she had allowed monsieur to go without her. This morning she was still depressed, and complained of headache. So, being a fine day, I persuaded her to take a walk in the forest while I packed her boxes. When she returned, she said her head was better, but she appeared to be in a state of great excitement. Instead of taking her *déjeuner* as usual, she packed a small basket, and telling me she was going to picnic in the forest, remained out till half an hour before the carriage arrived. That is all I know. I hope nothing has happened to madame. Is she, then, not with you, mademoiselle?"

Mademoiselle Mathilde repeated in as careless a tone as she could assume the explanation she had fabricated for her own household; and after bidding the woman prepare some dinner and a room for her, she directed her steps towards the château.

In the dim twilight the extensive range of unoccupied buildings, encircled by the sombre forest, and unrelieved by interior illumination, rose before her like a house of the dead. The keen March wind, sighing dismally through the trees, kept the emblazoned weathercocks in a perpetual state of creaking and uneasy motion, causing them to emit sounds the reverse of tuneful or enlivening.

Mademoiselle Delaforet could not repress a shudder as she approached the entrance and fumbled about until she found the bell.



After a long interval her straining ear caught the sound of approaching footsteps. Fitful gleams of light flashed through the barred windows, there was a clanking of chains, a withdrawal of bolts, and the door was slowly opened.

"Who is it?" asked a voice, which she recognized as that of the woman she had come to see.

"It is I, Mademoiselle Delaforet; I want to talk to you a little moment."

"Mademoiselle Delaforet! at this time of day, or, rather, of night. What can have brought you here? Pray come in," said Louise, in her most mellifluous tones, opening the door wide.

"I must speak with you quite alone," said the old lady, glancing hurriedly round the spacious marble-paved hall, in which the single flickering lamp sufficed but to make darkness visible.

"There is no fear of interruption, we are not overcrowded here," replied the woman, with a coarse, grating laugh. "Besides myself, there is only Monsieur Bernard and his wife, and both are in the kitchen, and more or less deaf. Be pleased to step in here."

Mademoiselle Delaforet followed her guide into the oak-panelled dining-room, and began without further preface: "I want you to give me the address of M. le Vicomte in Paris."

"For what purpose, if I may ask?"

"There is no need to ask. You are his confidante and emissary. You were at the chalet yesterday, the bearer of his base proposals. I know all, it is useless to attempt concealment with me," said Mademoiselle Mathilde, sternly.

"Mademoiselle does me too much honor, but I fail to see for what intent she requires the address of M. le Vicomte, or that I should be justified in giving that which he desires withheld."

"Woman, you will drive me mad with your equivocations. I tell you I must and will save my poor child from this wicked man."

"It is mademoiselle who talks in riddles. What have I to do with Madame Danvers, to whom I presume you refer?"

"You know where she is. You know he has enticed her away from her home and friends—"

"Is she not with you?" asked the woman, in tones of well-feigned surprise. "She told me only yesterday that she had decided to pay you a visit. She did not receive me too graciously, I can assure you."

"Will you or will you not tell me where she is?" asked Mademoiselle Mathilde, struggling to contain her wrath.

"How can I tell when I do not know myself?"

"It's a lie! Madame Danvers left for Paris this afternoon with your vile master."

"Impossible!" cried Louise, staring at her interlocutor in blank astonishment. Then added, in a tone of concentrated hate, "I wish it were true."

"Have you no shame—no pity for a young and thoughtless girl—that you gloat over her ruin? What harm has she ever done you?"

"Who pitied *me* when my husband beat me, deceived me, and



finally ran away and left me without a sou in the world? Nobody—and why? Because I was only a poor peasant girl. Had I been a fine lady, with airs and graces and lovers, like this spoiled darling, it would have been different. What harm has she done me? She has insulted me with her insolent happiness, and I hate her and her husband and her unborn child, that's all!"

"Then you refuse to help me to save her?" asked Mademoiselle Delaforet, almost terrified at the vehemence and intensity of the woman's passion.

"I not only refuse, but I will do everything in my power to thwart you. She turned against me. Good! It is my turn now. She shall suffer what I have suffered. She shall know what it is to be deserted and friendless—an outcast, without home and character—to be pointed at and scouted by all respectable persons. Oh, but I tell you, all you good people have much to answer for. And you are such blind fools too! You magnify our misfortunes into crimes; you treat us as reprobates and savages, and then, when we become the wild beasts you have made us, you preach to us of pity and forgiveness—*merci!* Revenge is the only luxury you have left us, and we enjoy it, I can tell you."

Mademoiselle Delaforet, accustomed to the unquestioned dictatorship of her little republic, had grown to pride herself upon her strength of nerve and power of will. But she was forced to confess that the woman who confronted her had shaken the one and successfully defied the other. Doubtless the unexpectedness of so furious an onslaught, and the circumstances and surroundings, tended to increase her sense of terror and helplessness. But the fact remained that she was beaten all along the line, and her one desire was to effect a speedy retreat. She moved slowly towards the door, followed by Louise, whose face still wore an expression of gratified malignity.

Once outside the house, the old lady's courage revived to some extent, and she turned to fire a parting shot at her adversary. "You are playing a dangerous game," she cried in a quavering voice. "You forget that there are commissaries of police and judges to deal with such as you."

"Bah! I snap my fingers at them. Neither you nor they can prove anything against me. I am the servant of M. de Malsherbes, and not the guardian of the virtue of your flighty favorite, formerly the respectable Madame Danvers—now, what shall we call her?" With these words and a mocking laugh, the woman terminated the interview by closing the door in the poor lady's face.

Utterly discomfited and discouraged, Mademoiselle Delaforet wended her way back to the chalet, where she passed the night in revolving in her mind a thousand different schemes for Carmen's recovery. Torture her brain as she would, she could find no escape from the terrible necessity of informing Vere of his wife's misconduct. Her idea of following the unhappy girl to Paris, and of rescuing her from the clutches of M. de Malsherbes, was frustrated by the obstinacy of his confederate. And not only that, but all hopes



of hushing up the scandal that would accompany a public exposure were destroyed. Without knowing the vicomte's whereabouts in Paris, a journey to the great city would be so much precious time wasted, and until she had consulted the injured husband, she felt that she had no right to place the matter in the hands of the police. Thus, in despair on the following morning she called at the telegraph-office on her way home and despatched an urgent message, informing Vere of his wife's disappearance, and begging him to return immediately.

\* \* \* \* \*

Twenty-four hours of restless anxiety, of weary waiting, accentuated by the misery of enforced inaction, elapsed before Vere arrived at the Pension in answer to this summons.

"Have you any news of her? Has she come back?" he asked eagerly, without pausing to go through the customary salutations.

Mademoiselle Delaforet looked up into his pale face and blood-shot eyes, which told of grief and anxiety too deep for words, and shook her head sadly. "Nothing but this—the note announcing her departure."

"There is some villany in this, and that hound, De Malsherbes, is at the bottom of it," he exclaimed, fiercely.

"I fear so. Louise was at the chalet the evening you left, and the next day Carmen departed for Paris with a man; my informant did not recognize him, but the description answers to that of the vicomte."

"Pray tell me all you know, and have done. Omit nothing; the smallest details may be of importance."

Thus urged, Mademoiselle Delaforet gave an account of her visit to Beaurivage, and of her interview with Louise.

While she spoke, Vere listened in stony silence. "Then you failed to discover his address?" he said, at length. "Surely, by threats or bribes, the woman could be made to speak."

"Hélas! I doubt it. She is a demon. You should have seen and heard her as I did."

"But the intendant—Monsieur Bernard!"

"I did not think of him. Though I doubt if he knows."

"At any rate, it is worth the trial. I will go there at once," said Vere, taking his hat and quitting the apartment as brusquely as he had entered it.

The conveyance that had brought him from the station was waiting outside, so that, in a few minutes, he was on his way to the château.

Later in the day Mademoiselle Delaforet received a note from Vere, which ran thus: "I have succeeded in obtaining the address, and am starting for Paris. Louise left yesterday, presumably to put M. de M—— on his guard; but he shall not escape me."



## CHAPTER XXIV.

"Diseases desperate grown,  
By desperate appliances are relieved,  
Or not at all."—SHAKESPEARE.

MOST men and women—at any rate, until they have reached the stage of the "sere and yellow leaf," when romance and passion have become undefined memories of a far-off past—are at times governed by sudden impulses and gusts of capricious fancy, which override the dictates of reason and set worldly wisdom and even self-interest at defiance.

In no department of human affairs is this more noticeable than in that relating to the affections. The "rule of contrary," a game dear to the nursery, is not unfrequently followed in bitter earnest by grown-up children in their mutual lovings and hatings. "Mais si tu m'aimes, je ne t'aime pas," expresses the attitude *vis-à-vis* to each other of countless youths and maidens who appear otherwise to be gifted with both amiability and common-sense.

Jack Holdsworth was an example of this class of amatory Irreconcilables, whose hearts are always in opposition—"out of pure cussedness," as a Yankee would say. His love for Psyche which owed its birth to her frank raillery and evident absence of sentimental attraction for his manly person and undeniable social position, had only attained its full growth when her point-blank refusal of his hand seemed to place her forever out of his reach.

In vain he argued with himself that he was a fool to go on lavishing his affections on a girl who declined to accept them when there were plenty of better looking and wealthier Andromedas ready to welcome any eligible Perseus who would rescue them from the rock of enforced celibacy. He remained blind to all feminine charms save those that were denied to him, and, regardless of the contrary result in his own case, made up his mind that as such love as his must eventually call forth an answering love in Psyche's bosom, he had only to persevere in order to be eventually rewarded.

Their pact of friendship proved but an ingenious device for sharpening his torments, for Psyche, in her desire to make what amends she could for his disappointment, and having besides a genuine liking for the young fellow, was pleasant and kind to the point of positive cruelty. Actuated by feminine curiosity and a spirit of contrariety not unprecedented in the most tender-hearted of her sex, she occasionally probed his wounds in order to ascertain for her own satisfaction how deep they were. And then, when the sufferer, galled beyond endurance, turned on her with fierce reproaches, or



reading in the interest she evinced in his mental condition evidence of an awakening affection, strove to urge his suit in tones of impassioned tenderness, she froze instantly, and began to upbraid him with the breach of their friendly understanding.

Before he left the neighborhood to rejoin his regiment, poor Jack, pocketing his dignity, made another unsuccessful appeal, and then, wounded to the quick by her apparent heartlessness, he violently annulled their treaty of friendship, and departed vowing eternal hatred to the entire sex, and more madly in love with Psyche than ever.

During the next few months he tried alternate doses of hard work and dissipation as a cure for his malady. Always more or less of a "thruster," he now rode to hounds with the recklessness of a man tired of life and seeking to break his neck by way of a diversion. As is generally the case with those who fearlessly affront danger, he had the most hair-breadth escapes, and emerged from numberless "purlers" and "crowners" bruised and breathless, but substantially unhurt.

One day, however, his good or—as he sometimes termed it—his evil luck forsook him, and he was conveyed to the nearest house on a hurdle, a mangled and bleeding mass. In madly forcing his horse over some impossible obstacle, the poor brute had fallen heavily, crushing his rider beneath him.

For days Jack's life hung by a thread. His mother and sister were telegraphed for, and arrived from the Riviera scarcely venturing to hope for more than that they might be in time to soothe his dying moments. But eventually his youthful vitality and strong constitution triumphed, and when the fever left him, he had only a crippled arm and the impress of an iron shoe on the side of his head to remind him of his narrow escape.

Jack being pronounced out of danger, and well on the road to convalescence, Mrs. Holdsworth, who was a chronic invalid, and under medical orders, returned to the "sunny South" with her daughter, having extracted a promise from Jack that he would join them there for the remainder of his sick leave as soon as he was capable of bearing the journey.

Psyche, of course, had heard of young Holdsworth's accident through Captain Compton, and her feelings may be more easily imagined than described. She had never concealed from herself that she entertained for the young man a more than ordinary regard, and had it not been for the memory of her dead and hopeless love for Vere, which made the mere thought of any fresh attachment seem a sort of sacrilege, her liking—as she now felt constrained to admit—might have soon ripened into something warmer.

In her first agony of fear and remorse, the girl's eyes were opened to the fact that her luckless suitor had occupied a larger place in her heart than she had ever imagined. The tender sentimental fancy for her cousin which owed its continuance to her intense sympathy and loyalty, while he was persecuted and in trouble, had faded imperceptibly as she found that she was no longer indispensable to



Vere's happiness. It had received its death-blow when she learned that he and Carmen had overcome their differences, and were united not only in name but in affection; and from its ashes, wakened by the shock of the tidings that her bright young lover was dying, the new passion sprang Phoenix-like into life and strength.

How bitterly she reproached herself with being indirectly the cause of Jack's mishap. How she longed to fly to his side, and ask his forgiveness for her blindness in ignoring and repressing the love he had so ardently pleaded for, and which she was now ready to accord.

The relief and joy of all his other friends put together could not have exceeded Psyche's when she heard that Jack's recovery was no longer doubtful, for, womanlike, she deemed that love deep enough to drive him to desperation on her account must still be hers, even though she might no longer dare to claim it. Notwithstanding that his projected departure for Cannes would preclude all present possibility of their meeting, she was filled with silent thankfulness, and accepted the uncertainty of the future as a righteous retribution for her own past folly.

How true it is that we rarely recognize our happiness as such until we have lost it. The every-day blessings of health and strength, of mental and bodily exercise and recreation, are too often overlooked in the vain strivings after some unattainable ideal. But let anything occur to interrupt the smooth revolutions of our wheel of life, and to put its wondrous mechanism ever so little out of gear, and we soon learn to appreciate and to pine after the comforts and pleasures in which we can no longer share.

Such, or something to the same effect, was the tone of young Holdsworth's reflections as he lay prostrate, weak and helpless as a child, during his first days of returning consciousness. Then intervened a period of placid content, when budding hope succeeded dark despair, followed by the impatience of daily increasing strength to shake off its invalid's fetters, and to enter with renewed zest and vigor into the pursuits of active life.

At length the doctor yielded to his patient's importunity and sanctioned the proposed journey southward. It was not only filial affection and the desire to turn his back on the scene of his late suffering that prompted the young man's speedy departure. During his convalescence he had given much thought to his position in regard to Psyche. That he still loved her he found it impossible to deny, but since it was evident that she could not return his affection, he determined not to allow a hopeless passion to blight his whole life and prospects. There were other things in the world worthy of attainment besides a woman's love, and although she would ever remain enshrined in his heart as a model of all that was beautiful and desirable in her sex, he would do his best to forget his unfortunate attachment.

Having been strictly enjoined not to overtax his strength by prolonged journeys, Jack spent a few days in London before starting for Paris, his next resting-place. He was thus able to appreciate



the pleasant contrast between the gay French capital in the full tide of the Easter festivities and the gloom of our own overgrown metropolis, where the fogs and mud of winter had only given place to nipping east winds and clouds of dust scarcely less depressing. The Hotel Continental, where he had engaged rooms, was crowded with visitors, mostly hailing from the other side of the Atlantic, and their alert and business-like method of pleasure-seeking, and quaint expressions and mannerisms when they met to talk over their day's excursions and experience, were a source of unfailing entertainment to Jack, who, like most convalescents, was disposed to be readily amused.

One evening the small table at which he dined was shared by a young Englishman of prepossessing appearance, who seemed to Jack's observant eyes to be under the influence of some overmastering emotion. His manner of eating and drinking, the way in which he gazed at the waiters when they addressed him, and fidgeted with his watch between the courses, contrasted strangely with the cold indifference with which he rebuffed young Holdsworth's attempts to enter into friendly converse. Jack was naturally very good-tempered, and not prone to take offence at trifles, but his neighbor's strange behavior went very near to upsetting his equanimity. Two or three times he discovered the man's eyes fixed upon him with an expression of fierce malignity, but as the stranger withdrew his gaze as soon as he felt he was observed, Jack mentally branded him as a lunatic, and left him to his own devices.

It so happened that during the evening the two young men found themselves again in close proximity in the smoking-room. While Jack was meditating a change of position, he was hailed by a brother-officer who was passing through Paris on his way home from India. Of course the two former comrades had plenty to say to each other, and Jack was called upon for a detailed account of his accident, and of all that preceded it of hunting and regimental interest.

When his friend had taken his departure, Jack was astonished to find himself suddenly confronted by the stranger.

"I beg your pardon," he began, "but is your name Holdsworth?"

"It is," replied Jack, curtly.

"I'm afraid you'll think me very rude, but the fact is, I overheard part of your conversation, and learning who you are, and as you probably know me by name, I thought I might presume to introduce myself as a friend of friends of yours," said the other, speaking rapidly and in evident confusion.

"Confidence trick!" ejaculated young Holdsworth, under his breath. Then, in a tone of marked indifference and incredulity, he said aloud, "And pray, sir, what is your name?"

"Vere Danvers."

"Impossible! I beg your pardon, but it seems so strange. Are you really the Vere Danvers that Psyche—Miss Danvers—was always talking about?" said Jack, reddening at his own crudeness of speech occasioned by surprise.



"Quite as possible, I assure you, as that you are the Lieutenant Holdsworth about whom my cousin, Miss Danvers, is always writing to me," replied Vere, abandoning his constrained manner. "I have a letter somewhere in which she informs me of your sad accident. Here it is, and here is another, in which she says there are hopes for your recovery. I am glad to see they have been fulfilled."

"Thanks very much," said Jack, heartily, convinced by a glimpse of Psyche's handwriting of his companion's identity, and wishing to make amends for his apparent rudeness. "Fact is, I didn't expect to meet you here. You quite took me by surprise, don't you know."

"Pray don't apologize; you must have thought me slightly insane, as, in fact, I am," rejoined Vere, with a bitter smile. "I'm in sad trouble, and in no state for polite society; but I need a friend instantly, a man in whose honor I can trust and who will see me through a difficulty. Hearing your name mentioned, and knowing that Psyche has so good an opinion of you, I thought I would venture to ask your help. Of course I shall expect you to treat me as unceremoniously as I have you, and to refuse if you think fit."

"Anything I can do, I shall be very pleased," murmured Jack.

"I may as well come to the point at once. I want you to be my second in a duel."

Young Holdsworth whistled softly through his teeth. "That's a rum go! Rather out of date, isn't it?"

"If you are inclined to help me, come up into my room, and I'll tell you all about it. There are too many people about here, and I do not want my injury published to the world until it has been avenged."

Thus urged, Jack followed his new friend up-stairs, and listened patiently while he narrated the circumstances of Carmen's disappearance, and his suspicions that she had been decoyed from her home by M. de Malsherbes. "I only returned from London this morning; after considerable difficulty I have succeeded in discovering the vicomte's address in Paris. I called there once this afternoon, but was told that he was out—probably making arrangements for his flight," said Vere, grinding his teeth with suppressed wrath. "The concierge said he was certain to return this evening, so I purpose calling upon him at once, to demand an explanation. He is a gentleman by birth, and, of course, cannot refuse me satisfaction. My only difficulty has been to secure a trusty friend, to see that all is fair between us, and to explain matters to my people at home if I fall. Will you do me this service?"

"I will," replied Jack, grasping his hand. "It's the first time I've been mixed up in an affair of the sort, but I'll do my best to see you through, and I hope you kill the rascally hound."

"I mean to try," said Vere, with an air of quiet determination. Then, without further parley, the two young men descended into the court-yard, and, calling a fiacre, were driven off in the direction of the Boulevard St. Michel.

Learning from the concierge that Monsieur Victor, the appellation under which the vicomte was known in the Quartier, was within,



Vere, followed by Jack, mounted the rickety stairs that led to his apartment without waiting to be announced. As they stood outside the door they could hear distinctly the voices of a man and a woman in loud colloquy, and for a moment Vere's heart stood still in mingled dread and hope that he might recognize Carmen's low contralto tones. Then, mastering his emotion, he knocked loudly. The conversation ceased, and the door was opened by Louise, who grinned maliciously at her late master as she ushered him into the room.

M. de Malsherbes, who was attired in a flowing dressing-gown, rose to receive his unexpected visitors with the utmost courtesy, and begged them to be seated.

"We shall not detain you long, and we prefer to stand," replied Vere, curtly.

"As you please, gentlemen. And now, may I ask to what I owe the honor of this visit? It is somewhat past the hour for a ceremonious call, so I will make no apology for my *déshabille*."

"Will you be so good as to tell that woman to leave the room? My business is of a strictly private nature," said Vere, striving to speak calmly.

"Certainly," replied the vicomte, in a tone of exquisite politeness.

"Louise, you can retire."

"And now to answer your question," said Vere, as the woman closed the door behind her. "You asked me why I have intruded myself upon you. I am come to force you to tell me what you have done with my wife."

"My dear sir, what an extraordinary errand!" replied the vicomte, with the most provoking *sang-froid*.

"Don't bandy words with me, or I shall forget myself and knock you down," cried Vere, in a fit of ungovernable rage.

"Gentlemen, you are two to one, and I am unarmed. If you are determined to fight, we will talk of that afterwards; but pray let us avoid a scandal," said M. de Malsherbes, with a deprecating gesture.

"Steady yourself, old man. He is right as far as the logic goes," remarked Jack, in his native tongue, pulling his friend by the sleeve. "It's no good spoiling his beauty if you are to have the opportunity of putting a bullet through him."

"I do not quite understand your friend, to whom, by-the-way, you have not introduced me; but I judge that he counsels gentlemanly behavior," said the vicomte, with a veiled sarcasm that made Vere's blood boil. However, by a violent effort of will, he mastered his passion, and apologizing for the oversight, presented young Holdsworth in due form.

M. de Malsherbes gracefully returned Jack's frigid salutation, and then addressed himself to him. "It is usual, sir, in affairs of honor—such as I judge your friend is anxious to engage in with me—for third parties to settle the necessary arrangements. If you will do me the honor of calling again to-morrow, I shall be prepared with a second."

Jack, as he bowed in reply, muttered in an undertone to Vere, "That may mean sloping."



"This is no ordinary affair, and I refuse to be governed by your empty forms and ceremonies," broke in Vere. "For the last time, I ask you, where is my wife?"

"I am not your wife's keeper. I wish I were," said the vicomte, in an insulting tone. Then turning his back on his irate adversary, "Listen, M. le Lieutenant. This gentleman, whom I already have no cause to love, whom, to speak plainly, I hate, has chosen to thrust a quarrel upon me. Very good; I thank him from the bottom of my heart, and I will meet him when and where you please. Only, I insist upon the proper observance of the code of honor settled for such encounters, and I refuse to hold any further personal communication with him, or to reply to any of his questions. If he molests me further, I shall send for the police. That is my last word."

"It's very awkward, but I suppose we must chance it," said Jack, taking Vere by the arm. "Come along, old fellow; we can't do any good by waiting here, and I think he means fighting; he looks so spiteful."

Vere, utterly unstrung by the unsuccessful issue of his visit, so far as discovering Carmen was concerned, followed his friend to the door, reeling like a drunken man.

Meanwhile M. de Malsherbes rang the bell, and Louise appeared. "Show these gentlemen out," he said, in a tone of normal politeness. "Gentlemen, I wish you good-evening."

"I shall wait upon you to-morrow about noon if that will suit you," said Jack, in his best French, as he returned the vicomte's salutation.

"Perfectly; my friend shall be here to meet you. Au revoir, M. le Lieutenant."

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## CHAPTER XXV.

"O woman! In our hours of ease  
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please,  
When pain and anguish wring the brow,  
A ministering angel—thou."—SCOTT.

AFTER bidding Vere farewell at the station, Carmen had driven back to the chalet and devoted the remainder of the afternoon to preparation for her temporary *déménagement* on the following day.

How dear her husband had become to her during the past few months she was able to gauge by the blank in her existence which the prospect of even this short separation seemed to occasion. As the evening drew on, her depression increased, and the sight of his unoccupied chair at the dinner-table deprived her of all appetite.

"It is no use, I cannot eat alone," she said, in answer to her maid's good-natured remonstrances as one dish after another was sent away untasted.

"Madame will get accustomed to it by-and-by," remarked Marie, with a philosophizing air. "Few husbands are so attentive as



monsieur, but even he must require a little holiday sometimes. Though why he chooses to go to that land of fogs I cannot imagine."

"You must not say anything against England, Marie. It is my husband's country, and he loves it. Besides, he has gone on business, and not to amuse himself," replied Carmen, for the sake of keeping up the conversation. "Hark! There's somebody at the front-door. Go, see who it is. Who can be coming to see me at this late hour?"

Marie left the room, and after a short parley in the hall returned to inform her mistress that Louise from the château wished to speak with her on a matter of extreme urgency.

Carmen pondered for a few moments. She feared and disliked her former servant, and was more than half inclined to refuse her an audience. However, curiosity and the longing to have some one to talk to carried the day, and she desired Marie to show the woman in.

"I am the bearer of evil news," began Louise in a tragic voice, presenting the letter which M. de Malsherbes had written to her dictation at their last interview.

Carmen glanced through the few shakily-written lines and turned pale. "Is it true? Is he really dying?" she asked.

"I fear so. He is suffering from the heart, and the doctors hold out no hopes of his recovery."

"Poor man, I am so sorry; but what can I do? What he asks is impossible."

"How impossible? You did not scruple to win his heart when it was whole, and now it is broken by your cruel treatment you cannot refuse to grant his dying request," exclaimed the woman, with well-feigned astonishment and indignation.

"But my husband, if he should hear of it! Besides, I never cared for M. de Malsherbes, and I told him so when he persisted in insulting me with his odious addresses; you know, when—"

"And do you suppose that a man whom you have befooled and encouraged up to the point that he believes his love is returned, and then threw over to suit your own convenience, can treat the matter so lightly?" exclaimed Louise, violently. "No, madame; his death is at your door, and the smallest reparation you can make is to see him once more and receive his forgiveness, poor gentleman."

Carmen hesitated. Her romantic turn of mind rendered her an easy dupe to this trumped-up story; but, although she was credulous, she had awakened to a keener sense of what was right and wrong, and that she should again imperil her reputation by visiting this man in her husband's absence seemed monstrous.

"Tell him I am very, very sorry if my folly is the cause of his illness, but I cannot and must not renew it," she said at last, with tears in her eyes.

"Where's the harm? Your husband need never know. And surely you cannot be so hard-hearted as to let your lover die without one word of sympathy and kindness. His only fault, if fault it



be, was loving you too well, and for that you are yourself mainly answerable."

"I don't deny that I was weak, selfish—wicked, if you like. But I have not only myself to consider," replied Carmen, in a low voice.

"You think your husband a paragon, no doubt; most young wives do till they find out the contrary. How about *la belle cousine* that he has gone to visit over there?"

"Louise, you forget yourself," exclaimed Carmen, angrily. "I am no longer the child that I was when you tried to ruin my happiness with your wicked counsels, and nearly succeeded. I know my husband too well now to be frightened by any bugbear of jealousy."

"Pray accept my congratulations on your rapid advance in knowledge," replied the woman, with a mocking smile. "But, for the sake of your husband's love, which you so justly prize, I would advise you to be careful how you force M. le Vicomte to become your enemy. A desperate man is dangerous even when he is dying."

"What harm can he do me—more than he attempted to do?"

"Have you forgotten that Monsieur Danvers has never yet been informed of your conduct during his last absence? Suppose M. de Malsherbes were to write and tell him of the pleasant little *tête-à-tête* interviews you were amiable enough to grant him?"

"M. de Malsherbes is a gentleman!" interrupted Carmen, scornfully.

"Yes; but he is a *man*, and a rejected lover, and revenge is sweet. He did not bid me tell you in so many words, but he gave me to understand that, if you were obdurate, he would not answer for the consequences."

"Very well, then, you may tell him that I despise his threats as much as I loath his former base attempts to impose on my ignorance and folly," cried Carmen, thoroughly roused. "I am glad you have thrown off the mask; for now I no longer reproach myself on his account, but solely on my own and on my husband's, to whom I am determined to tell everything just as it happened."

Before Louise had recovered from the effects of this vigorous and unexpected *riposte*, Carmen summoned Marie to show her out, and the discomfited envoy retired, muttering curses on her own stupidity and the girl's obstinate refusal to fall into the trap so carefully prepared for her.

The next morning Carmen awoke with a headache, the result of over-excitement and a night spent in vain regrets that she had not sooner found courage to unburden her conscience and seek Vere's forgiveness for her past misconduct. It was only now that she was fully able to appreciate the terrible risks to which she had subjected herself in the gratification of her anger and vanity, and she dreaded the effects such a confession of weakness would have on a mind like her husband's. However, with all her faults, cowardice, either moral or physical, was not one of Carmen's failings, and she determined to make a clean breast of it at the earliest possible moment, feeling that it would be far easier for her to act as her own accuser



than to live in the dread of having to rebut the garbled account of her unwise proceedings, which might at any time be furnished by M. de Malsherbes or his minion.

Tempted by the bright beauty of the morning, Carmen determined to seek relief from her anxious thoughts in physical exercise. Accordingly, she sallied forth for a stroll in the forest, and had not proceeded far when the sound of a foot-fall behind her caused her to turn her head. To her no small alarm, she discovered that she was being followed by a man muffled in a long black cloak. A large slouch hat of the sombrero type partially concealed his features, but something in his figure and movements seemed familiar to her. Instantly she imagined that her pursuer was none other than M. de Malsherbes. But if so, what of Louise's story of his lying on his death-bed in Paris? In any case, the apparition boded her no good. There was no help at hand, that part of the forest being lonely and unfrequented, and the girl's first instinct was to seek safety in flight.

Further consideration, however, convinced her of the futility of that course, as the stranger barred the way that led back to the chalet; so, summoning all her courage, she turned to meet her pursuer, who had gained ground rapidly, and was now close behind her. What was her surprise when, after a rapid glance into her face, he removed his hat and disclosed the well-known features of her long-absent father.

"Carmen, my child, do you not know me?" he cried, advancing with out-stretched arms.

"My father! Is it possible that you are alive after all these years?" answered the girl, flinging herself, weeping with joy and surprise, on his neck.

"Yes, dear one. Your father is alive, or as much alive as a man can be after years of imprisonment in a Spanish dungeon."

"In prison! You have been in prison, my poor father, and I never knew it, and thought you had deserted or forgotten your poor little Carmen."

"Heaven be praised! some one has been found to replace me," said the old man, trembling with excitement. "Carmenita mia, you are now a dignified matron, I hear."

"How did you learn that? And where do you come from? And why did they put you in prison? Tell me quick. I have a thousand questions to ask."

"Paciencia, carissima. My breath is short, and this sudden joy is almost too much for my weak heart."

"Poor dear; you are suffering. You are tired. Come to my house. You can rest there and tell all at your leisure," cried the girl, tenderly.

"No; sweet one. I dare not enter your door. I am an escaped convict, and even now the police may be on my track."

"Oh, father, how horrible! But what do you mean to do, then?"

"I am making my way to England. Once there, I am safe."

"My husband is in London. You must go to him. He will pro-



tect you. He is so good and strong," exclaimed Carmen, triumphantly.

"Come, little one, sit down beside me on this trunk, and I will tell you my story. After that we will decide what is best to be done; that is, if you still have a corner left in your heart for your poor old father."

"You shall share the whole of it equally with my husband. And now tell me all. Do not fear. I will answer for your safety till I can hand you over to Vere, who will love you for my sake."

Thus urged, the old man—whose face looked pinched and wan, now that the flush of excitement had died out of his cheeks—began his narrative. "You were too young when I left you in charge of Mademoiselle Delaforet to be intrusted with so weighty a secret, otherwise I might have prepared you for subsequent events. You must know, then, my child, that for many years I have been a member of a secret political society. What its aims were and are does not concern you now. But the fact remains that I was drawn into it in my hot youth, and have never been able to shake myself free from its clutches. Six years ago I was summoned by the council to start on an important and dangerous mission to Cuba, which was then struggling to free itself from the Spanish yoke. To refuse was certain death, and so I went, much against my will. After numerous adventures—which I will reserve for a future occasion—I was taken prisoner by the Royalist troops, brought over to Spain, and flung into prison with a number of other so-called rebel leaders. There I remained until a few weeks ago, when a party of us managed to effect our escape, and worked our way to Paris, en route for England. Once there, I can snap my fingers at these bloodhounds; but there is no safety for me in France, as I am told that the police of the two governments are accustomed to oblige each other in the matter of political refugees, and probably a reward is offering for my reapprehension at this very moment."

"Oh, father, why did you waste time in coming here? You should have gone straight on to London."

"And miss seeing my little Carmen? No, dear one. I have not long to live, and but for the hope of meeting you again I should not have faced the terrible fatigues and privations I have had to undergo since my escape."

"Listen. I have an idea," cried the girl, suddenly. "Travelling with me, you will be unremarked and unsuspected. I will accompany you to England. We will start at once; this very day. We shall take Vere by surprise, but I'll answer for it he will be delighted to see me, and you."

"Of the latter I am not quite so sure. A political refugee is hardly a respectable Englishman's beau-ideal of a father-in-law. However, I shall not trouble you long."

"Don't talk like that, father; you don't know Vere. He is not respectable—at least not in the sense of being scandalized at everything outside of his own way of life—or he would not love me as he does."



"Very well, my child. I leave myself in your hands, only asking you not to mention the fact of my return to any living soul until I have placed the Channel between myself and my pursuers," said her father, wearily.

"Have no fear; you will find me a skilful conspirator. I will bring my *déjeuner* out here, and we will have an *al fresco* picnic, with no one to disturb us. While we are eating we can mature our plans. Is not that a good notion? Now, you stay here behind this thicket until I return. *Au revoir*;" and kissing her hand to him with a bright smile, Carmen directed her steps to the chalet.

In pursuance of her plan, when the vehicle arrived to transport her to the Pension, Carmen entered it and drove away without breathing a word to her maid or the driver of her intended change of destination. Consequently, the latter was somewhat astonished at finding himself hailed by a gentleman half a mile from Beaurivage, and still more so when Carmen invited the stranger to enter, and directed their course to the railway-station.

"Sapristi! V'la une belle affaire," muttered the Jehu as he scrutinized the note which Carmen, before entering the station with her mysterious companion, bade him deliver to Mademoiselle Delaforet with all possible speed. However, being like most of his class something of a philosopher, and not unaccustomed to the vagaries of grass-widows, he made his wonderment the excuse for an extra *litre* of *petit-bleu* at the nearest wine-shop, and then drove off, meditatively, to execute his commission.

Meanwhile Monsieur Mendes and his daughter arrived at Paris, intending to push on to London by the night mail. But finding her father utterly worn out with the day's excitement and unfit for farther travel, Carmen persuaded him to pass the night there.

Having calculated that they would be with Vere before any news of her disappearance could possibly reach him, the girl had thought it needless to write or telegraph to him before she left home. And now, in the excitement and nervous trepidation caused by her father's precarious state, the advisability of taking some steps to reassure her husband quite escaped her mind.

It was not until the evening of the following day that Monsieur Mendes declared himself sufficiently recovered to resume the journey. Anxious as Carmen was to feel that her father was safe from pursuit, he looked so weak and ill, that she assented most reluctantly to his urgent entreaties for their immediate departure.

Unaccustomed to travelling on her own responsibility, the girl was dazed and bewildered by the noise and bustle of the great terminus; and the nervous dread that every official or by-stander who gazed inquiringly in their direction might hold a warrant for her father's arrest, helped to increase her excitement and perturbation. At last, however, she was able to support the old man's tottering steps to a reserved coupé, and after much preliminary whistling and bell-ringing, the *train-maraîs* got under way and steamed noisily out of the station.

In the hurry of their departure the travellers had omitted to sup-



ply themselves with the necessary wraps for a night voyage across the Channel. Consequently, when they reached Folkestone in the cheerless light of early morning, both were chilled to the bone. For the first time Carmen's courage forsook her. Her father, benumbed with cold, seemed to have lost all sensibility and power of locomotion, and only groaned and murmured inarticulately when she endeavored to persuade him to take her arm and ascend the companion, up which the crowd was thronging towards the landing-stage. What if he were about to die—here in this strange place where she knew nobody—before she could reach London and Vere? The thought completely unnerved her, and she sank down beside the old man's recumbent form and buried her face in her hands.

Nowhere is the sense of loneliness more oppressive than in the midst of a noisy and self-absorbed crowd. Excited paterfamilias shouting at porters, and dashing wildly about the saloon with arms full of packages; pale-faced females clutching anxiously after fractious children, who persistently effected their escape, and spread themselves recklessly under the feet of the hurrying passengers; cockney tourists, who had scraped acquaintance on the "Continong," exchanging farewells and addresses; gratuity-seeking stewards dragging bundles from under seats and off tables—everywhere hustling and jostling, noise and confusion—everybody wrapped up in himself and his belongings, and no one to give a thought to the poor invalid foreigner and his helpless companion. Thus Carmen despairingly diagnosed the situation, when suddenly she felt a touch on her shoulder, and, looking up, beheld a jolly-looking, middle-aged Englishman, who was evidently about to address her, when his speech was cut short by a violent jerk at his coat-tails from an ultra-fashionably attired young lady with a washed-out complexion and pale blue eyes, who stood behind him.

"Don't be so stupid, pa. Why don't you mind your own business?" said the gayly-dressed damsel in an audible whisper. "You're always meddling with other people's concerns."

"Leave me alone, Vic. Can't you see that the poor gentleman is ill, and the young lady don't seem quite to know what to do? Do you, missie?" replied the parent, plucking up courage and addressing Carmen good-naturedly.

"Thank you, sir; I am somewhat perplexed. I am a stranger, and my poor father is not well. Indeed, I fear he is very ill, and I do not know how I shall get him to London," replied Carmen in her best English.

"To London? Well, now, that's lucky. Me and my daughter happen to be bound for that self-same little 'amlet, so that, if you've no objection, miss, we'll join forces and help look after the old gentleman. Won't we, Vic?" said the stranger, endeavoring to hide the kindness of his proposal under an air of unconcerned waggishness and jollity.

Carmen was extremely sensitive, and this display of friendly interest from a perfect stranger, when she had pictured herself helpless and deserted, went straight to her heart. "You are too kind,



sir," she answered, raising her glistening eyes to his; "but I hardly like to trouble you and your daughter."

Mr. Moggs, for he it was on his way home after his annual journey to "Parry," in search of spring novelties for the house in Wood Street, was completely enslaved by that glance. Notwithstanding the forty and odd years spent in the dull routine of business, he still retained an eye to female charms, and a romantic corner in his heart for beauty in distress.

"Lor' love you, my dear, don't talk of trouble, if we can be of any use," he exclaimed, enthusiastically. "And now let's see about getting the old gentleman ashore, or we shall lose the train. What's he suffering from?"

"He's very weak and feeble, and the cold journey has been too much for him, I fear."

"I know what'll do him good," said Mr. Moggs, producing his pocket-flask, and holding it to Monsieur Mendes' blue, quivering lips. "There, sir, take a pull at that; it'll make a new man of you."

Mr. Moggs was right, for after a few minutes the invalid had recovered sufficient animation to walk up the gangway, supported by his daughter and their new friend. Then, having conducted his charges to the refreshment-room, the indefatigable traveller left them to regale themselves on the vile concoctions sold at famine prices under the name of tea and coffee, and rushed off to get his and their baggage passed through the Customs. He was evidently known to the officials, or possessed some passport to their favor; for in less than five minutes he returned, his face aglow with smiles, and led the way to the platform, where the train for the metropolis was rapidly loading.

"Now, then, hurry up there, please, if you're going on," shouted the guard, in stentorian tones.

"Halloo, William, you've lost your voice since I saw you last; you really should look after those lungs of yours," said Mr. Moggs, facetiously.

"Lor' bless me! It's you, Mr. Moggs. How are you, sir?" said the official, with a friendly salute. "I ain't seen yer since Christmas."

"No more you have, William. Well, just you find me an empty first-class compartment, and mark it 'reserved,' for me and my friends, and you shall have seen me to your advantage."

The guard took the hint, and soon the four were comfortably settled, and rattling along towards their destination.

All this time Miss Moggs, while not actually protesting against her father's attentions to the strangers, evidently determined to evince her disapprobation by the extreme hauteur of her manner towards them. To Carmen's apologetic utterances she only vouchsafed monosyllabic replies, and left the whole burden of the conversation to her parent, who was, fortunately, quite capable of sustaining it. It was not that Miss Victoria was ill-natured or hard-hearted, but her high-flown susceptibilities and secret desire to be taken for one of the "upper ten" were ruffled by her father's undignified habit of being "hail fellow, well met" with everybody he came across.



However, when Carmen incidentally let fall that she was married to Vere Danvers—the former beau-ideal of Miss Victoria's virgin heart, and whom she still revered and worshipped in secret, as the first real gentleman of her acquaintance—the young lady instantly thawed, and, after a painful, and seemingly uncalled-for fit of blushing, she joined most amicably in the conversation, and tried to outvie her father in the expression of her interest in their former lodger.

It was a great relief to Carmen to discover that she had some sort of claim on these chance acquaintances, who seemed disposed to render the help she so much needed. Although she was not quite clear as to the exact status of their friendship with Vere, it sufficed for her that they knew and respected him, and she gratefully accepted Mr. Moggs's kindly suggestion that he and his daughter should accompany them to the hotel where her husband was lodging.

"I should much like to see our young gentleman again, and it's very little out of our way, is it, Vic?" said Mr. Moggs, as he entered the cab and gave the driver his directions.

"It's really very kind of you, and I am sure my husband will be most delighted," cried Carmen, who had quite recovered her spirits at the near prospect of meeting her natural protector.

Great, therefore, was the disappointment of them all to learn that Mr. Danvers had taken his departure on the previous evening.

"But where can he have gone to?" cried Carmen. "He intended to remain here at least a week, I know."

"That I can't say, ma'am," replied the hall porter; "all I know is, that I gave the gentleman a telegram yesterday afternoon, which seemed to upset him like, and he packed his bag and started off without leaving word where he was going."

"It must have been from Danverfield. Perhaps his father wanted to see him. How provoking! What is to be done?" exclaimed the young wife, ready to cry with disappointment.

"Couldn't you send a telegram to ask if he's there?" suggested the ready Mr. Moggs.

"Thank you, I will," she replied, eagerly; "but what shall I do till he returns?"

"If your father can stand the journey, I propose that you come and stay with us at Shepherd's Bush, Rose Cottage, the old address. Mr. Danvers will know his way there, I'll lay a fiver."

"You are really too good; but I think the less my father is moved about the better in his present state."

"Well, then, while you're writing your telegram, I'll see about engaging rooms for you here if you'll allow me. The manager's a pal of mine," said Mr. Moggs, confidentially.

Carmen readily assented to this proposal; and after seeing his protégés comfortably installed, and giving her the address of a well-known physician in case Monsieur Mendes should have a relapse, the kind-hearted bagman took his departure, promising to call, or send his daughter, on the following day, to see how they were getting on, and learn if they had succeeded in discovering Vere's whereabouts.



## CHAPTER XXVI.

“Ah! were I sever’d from thy side,  
Where were thy friend, and who my guide?”—BYRON.

THE Danverfield party, consisting of the squire, who was now fairly convalescent, Mrs. Danvers, Mary, and Charlie, were assembled at the mid-day meal, when Carmen’s telegram arrived, addressed to Psyche.

“How tiresome that the dear child isn’t here,” said the old lady, querulously, putting on her spectacles to scan the envelope, in the vain hope that it might afford a clew to the identity of the sender; “I wonder if by any chance it is from Vere?”

“It can hardly be from him, mother, because he would know that Psyche has returned to Scarboro’,” replied Mary.

“Still, Vere is in town, and he promised, if he could spare a couple of days, he would run down to see us,” persisted Mrs. Danvers.

“Surely, in that case, he would have addressed the telegram to you or father. Besides, mother, you know he was so anxious not to leave Carmen in her present state a moment longer than he could help, that he was almost certain to postpone his visit here till he could bring her with him next month.”

“What’s the use of wondering and worrying about whom it’s from when you can easily find out by opening it?” asked the squire, testily, looking up from his plate. “You women are so fond of a little bit of mystification, and, to hear you talk, one would imagine that there’s nobody else in the world likely to send a telegram but that precious boy.”

Although since his accident these ebullitions of temper were of rarer occurrence than formerly, the old gentleman still occasionally indulged in a vicious lash out at his mild and unoffending wife and daughter. Indeed, sad to say, their unvarying meekness was a potent factor in his irritability.

Mrs. Danvers started nervously at the sound of her husband’s voice, and was obediently about to carry out his suggestion, when she was arrested by scruples of conscience.

“I don’t think it would be nice for me to open it, not being addressed to me,” she said in a faint voice, flushing painfully.

“Nice be hanged!” retorted the squire, who, for all his pretended indifference, was quite as anxious as his wife for news of Vere. “Give it to me. I’ll open it. What a confounded fuss about nothing. As if a telegram was like a private letter. Here, Charlie, you’re the chit’s brother, you read it,” and he tossed the pink paper across the table to his nephew.



Thus urged, Charlie unfolded it, and read aloud: "From Carmen Danvers, — Hotel, London, to Miss Psyche Danvers, Danverfield, Yorks. Is Vere with you? Have arrived here to see him on important affair; find he has gone, no address."

"It's strange what can have brought her over. And she must have come without his knowledge, too, or he would certainly have arranged to meet her," remarked Charlie, meditatively, passing the telegram to his aunt, who seemed quite bewildered by this unexpected intelligence.

"Whatever shall we do? How vexed Vere will be to have missed her!" cried Mary, with a face full of concern.

"Serves the idiot right for marrying an outlandish foreigner. What else could he expect?" growled the squire.

"Poor child! What will become of her in that great, bewildering city, all by herself, and in her delicate state of health. I shouldn't wonder if it kills her," gasped Mrs. Danvers, plaintively.

"Good job too," continued the squire, who abominated a fuss at any time, and particularly at meals. "She's been more trouble than enough already, confound her, with her fads and fancies."

"Now, father, you know you don't mean that," interposed Mary, injudiciously, but stopped short at a warning signal from Charlie, who, turning to his uncle, endeavored to ward off his rising irritation by asking him in a calm and business-like manner what he thought ought to be done under the circumstances.

At first the old gentleman pretended not to hear, and kept his eyes obstinately fixed on his plate, as his habit was when he was out of temper. Charlie waited a few minutes, and then reiterated his question.

"Do as you think best," was the reply, in a milder tone than he had anticipated. "If any one here had a grain of sense, I should say one of you go up to town and look after this mad creature until her husband is found; but it's no use sending one maniac to take charge of another."

The young man was too habituated to his uncle's mode of speech to take umbrage at this uncomplimentary retort, and he replied quietly, "If you think you can spare me for a day or two, I will take the message over to Psyche this afternoon, and we can run up to London to-morrow. Perhaps, meanwhile, she may have heard something of Vere's movements."

The squire grunted assent to this proposition, adding, with a malicious chuckle and a sidelong glance in the direction of his wife and daughter, "It's a blessing that there's *one* woman in the world with her head screwed on the right way. All the rest of the sex look backward, or sideways, or inward, and then wonder why the deuce they can't see straight."

Armed with this permission, Charlie promptly ordered the dog-cart, and drove off to catch the afternoon train to Scarborough.

Arrived at home, he found his sister in a state of great perturbation, caused by a letter that she had received from Vere that morning.



"Oh, Charlie, you can't think what a relief this news is," she cried, when she had glanced through Carmen's message. "It seems that Mademoiselle Delaforet has wired Vere that Carmen has gone off with the Vicomte de Malsherbes, an old flame of hers, about whom she was infatuated some months ago, and he has started off in hot haste to find her. Poor boy, he seems quite heart-broken about it; and no wonder I couldn't believe it of her, although the evidence was strong against her."

"It certainly is a rum go. What on earth can have brought the girl over here? She must have taken leave of her senses."

"She's such a child of impulse, that there's no saying what has caused this strange behavior. Perhaps she fled to avoid that brute's persecution; but it's no use guessing when we can soon know for ourselves. Of course, I must go up to her at once; will you come with me?"

"I've come on purpose."

"There's a dear boy. And now get me a couple of telegram forms, and I will wire to Carmen to say we are coming, and to Vere to let him know that she is safe."

"You'd make a capital man of business," said Charlie, admiringly, as he obeyed her behests.

"That's what uncle always says," smiled the girl. Then, as a fresh thought struck her, "Where am I to address Vere? He may be anywhere. Stop a bit. Mademoiselle Delaforet is sure to know his whereabouts. Dear old thing, I can picture her dismay, but it's a pity she let her imagination run away with her quite so quickly."

"There will be a deuce of a row if Vere comes across this vicomte. He's slow to anger, but rather warm-tempered when he's really put out," said Charlie, meditatively.

"Gracious me, I never thought of that!" cried Psyche, with a face of horror. "I know something of the other man. He's as proud as Lucifer and half mad. They'll come to blows, and there'll be a duel."

"If it's confined to fisticuffs, I'll lay odds on Vere; but these blessed foreigners have a nasty habit of settling their differences with cold steel; and Vere's not much of a hand at that, nor with pistols either."

"Don't, Charlie; you make my blood run cold. Merciful heavens, if either of them were to be killed, and all for a mistake! We must push on to Paris at once, in case Vere does not get my telegram," said the girl, resolutely. "Let me see: we can catch the night express to London if we start in half an hour, and then, after seeing Carmen, one or both of us must follow up Vere without a moment's delay."

"I'm ready if you are," replied her brother, who rather enjoyed the prospect of a little excitement and "a fling" on the Continent.

"I'll leave you to explain matters to mother and father while I get my things together. I sha'n't be more than twenty minutes. Don't forget to send for a cab;" and Psyche flew up-stairs to make a few hurried preparations for this sudden departure.



It was close on midnight when the travellers arrived at the hotel where Carmen had taken up her abode, but she was expecting their arrival, and had not retired to rest. On learning this, Charlie ensconced himself in the smoking-room while his sister was ushered up-stairs to her friend's apartments.

As Psyche entered the sitting-room the door of an adjoining chamber was gently opened, and Carmen appeared and welcomed her with every demonstration of delight and relief.

"How good of you to have come all this distance to help me in my trouble," she cried, in an ecstasy of gratitude. "Oh, Psyche, you don't know how miserable I have been, so lonely, so helpless, in this great strange place, and no tidings of my husband. What can have come to him? Have you any idea?"

"Set your mind at rest, dear. Vere is safe and well. I heard this morning from him, and you shall see his letter presently. But first tell me what brought you here so unexpectedly," replied Psyche, taking Carmen's hand in hers and leading her to a seat near the fire.

"I came with my poor father. He is in the next room. Very ill—dying, I am afraid;" and the large dark eyes were suffused with tears.

"Your father! My poor child. But why didn't you let your husband know before starting? It would have saved all this trouble," exclaimed Psyche, with a mingled feeling of relief and annoyance—relief at finding that Vere's terrible anxiety was unfounded, annoyance to think that it should have been caused by his wife's thoughtlessness.

"Wait till you hear everything, and I think you will say that this time I am not to blame. My dear father was escaping from the hands of cruel men; he implored me to save him. What could I do but consent? He is my only parent; my only relation living. I had not seen him for six years; did not even know that he was alive. Poor dear, I have only found him to lose him again forever, I fear," replied Carmen, burying her face in her hands and letting her tears fall freely.

"Let us hope for the best. Perhaps, now that he has you to look after him, he may recover. What is his complaint?" asked Psyche, gently.

"The physician who has been here to see him says he is suffering from—I can't remember the long Latin word, but it means wasting away."

"May I see him? I am accustomed to sick-rooms, more so than you are, dear; and perhaps I may be able to suggest something for your poor father's comfort."

"He is sleeping now; he has been so ever since we arrived. I shall have to awake him presently to give him some nourishment, and then, if you are willing— Oh, Psyche! what an angel you are. And I treated you so badly not long ago;" and the girl rose and knelt by her friend's side, looking up with such pleading eyes that Psyche felt constrained to bend down and tenderly kiss the lovely upturned face.

"You magnify your little failings, my dear, as you do my small



virtues," she said, in a soothing tone. "Friendship such as ours cannot be destroyed by a slight misunderstanding, nor any number of them."

"But you don't know how wicked I was," cried Carmen, as eager to confess now as she had been to suspect. It was not in the girl's nature to do anything by halves, and she felt that she could not accept Psyche's renewed affection until she had owned the full enormity of her own falling away from their pact. "Psyche, dearest, don't hate me; but I hated *you* once. I believed that you loved Vere, and that you wanted to—wanted to rob me of his love."

"Carmen! How could you?" exclaimed Psyche, startled out of her self-possession by this disclosure of a suspicion which, although so wide of the truth in respect to her intentions, had not been at one time without foundation as regards her feelings towards her cousin. It is so much easier to hear with equanimity an utterly false accusation than one that contains a substratum of truth—and a flush of shame and indignation rose to her brow. Involuntarily she made a movement as though to repel the penitent who knelt at her feet imploring her forgiveness for having doubted her. But Psyche was too honest at bottom to punish another for inadvertently lighting on her moral corn. Six months ago these words would have caused her an agony of grief and pain, because the wound was not yet healed. Now her only sensations were shame for her former weakness, and a nervous shrinking from laying it bare either to her own eyes or those of Carmen. "How could you think so meanly of me—and of your husband?" she asked, reproachfully, but without a trace of anger in her tone.

Carmen looked up. "I know I was mad. I know now that Vere loved me all the time. And as for you, I have said you are an angel; so you will forgive me, won't you?"

"Let us say no more about it," replied Psyche, passing her hand caressingly over the girl's head. "Come, we have wasted time enough in idle talk. Let us be up and doing. To-morrow, or rather this morning, we must start for Paris to find your distracted husband. See, here is his letter, which will explain the situation better than I can."

"Holy mother! I never dreamed that he would hear of my departure until I had rejoined him," cried Carmen, starting up in a fresh agony of despair as the facts dawned upon her. "Truly, I was born under an unlucky star. I am always doing wrong unintentionally. What can I do? I cannot leave my father."

"No; that is out of the question, and I am sure that Vere would not wish you to do so if he knew."

"You say that you would have heard by now had he received your telegram?"

"I asked Mademoiselle Delaforet to wire me here if she was at Boisy, or if she knew his address."

"He will challenge M. de Malsherbes, and get killed, for certain. Psyche, dearest, if you love me, help me to save him," said the girl, imploringly.



"Of course I will. That is why I am here. Unless there is a reply to my message in the morning, Charlie and I will cross over to Paris and bring him back to you here safe and sound," answered her friend, cheerily. "And now tell me all about your father, so that I may explain matters to Vere; and then I will try and get a few hours' sleep to fortify myself for to-morrow's journey."

When Carmen had finished her narration, Psyche, after taking a peep at the invalid, sent for her brother to communicate her plan of action to him, and then retired for the night.

While they were sitting at breakfast on the following morning, a telegram arrived from Mademoiselle Delaforet to the effect that Vere was in Paris, but that she did not know his address.

"That settles the question," said Psyche to her brother. "We must follow him up and track him out without a moment's delay."

"Won't it be rather like looking for a needle in a bottle of hay?" asked Charlie. "Paris is not like Danverfield."

"I have his old address, and if he is not there his bankers will probably be able to help us to find him. Failing that, we must resort to the police," replied his sister, with characteristic determination, as she rose from the table, and hurried up to say good-by to Carmen, and bid her be of good cheer.

Acting on information which they obtained at his former lodgings in the Quartier St. Honoré, Psyche and her brother drove to the Hotel Continental, expecting to find there the object of their quest. To their intense disappointment and almost dismay, they were met with the intelligence that Monsieur Danvers had left that same afternoon in company with another gentleman. Where they had gone to, the clerk in the bureau could not inform madame; but, possibly, the concierge might be able to do so if madame would kindly address herself to him.

Accordingly the smiling concierge was summoned and interviewed. "Oh yes; he remembered perfectly Monsieur Danvers, and he remembered also hearing him direct the cocher to the Gare du Nord, and remark to his companion that they had plenty of time to catch the four-o'clock train to Villeneuve."

Psyche's heart knocked loudly against her breast. She knew that Villeneuve was on the Belgian frontier, and a favorite resort for gentlemen desirous of settling affairs of honor.

"What was he like—this other gentleman? Was he tall, and thin, and dark; with a mustache—*à l'Imperial*?" she asked, in an unsteady voice, imagining, in her ignorance of the formalities always observed on these solemn occasions, that Vere and the vicomte might be journeying there together, like two small street urchins intent on "having it out."

"Oh no, madame; the other was an English gentleman—an officer, I believe. Stop a little moment. I know his name too—he was staying here—Holdsworth; yes, that was it, M. le Lieutenant Holdsworth."

Surprise deprived Psyche of all power of speech and set the hot blood mantling in her cheeks. "She should see him again, would



be able to find out if he had forgiven and—(ah no! not that) forgotten her. Perhaps even she might have an opportunity of—of letting him divine that she had not known her own mind when she had refused his love.” Vere, Carmen, the object of her journey—all were momentarily forgotten in this sweet dream.

“Jack Holdsworth gone off with Vere—by Jove, that beats cock-fighting. I expect he’s going to act as his second,” exclaimed Charlie, excitedly, in her ear, thereby rudely recalling her to the world of unpleasant and inharmonious facts—to this world, where to love generally means to suffer.

Men are seldom quick at reading a woman’s thoughts in the light either of words, looks, or actions; and this arises from the fact that the male mind attempts to judge them from a masculine stand-point, whereas the natural instinct of the other sex is towards concealment and reticence; at any rate, where the affections are concerned. Thus Charlie was completely puzzled when his sister, who had hitherto held the reins and directed their course with a steady hand and an unfaltering purpose, turned to him and hesitatingly asked his advice as to what was best to be done under the circumstances.

“There’s only one thing we can do if we want to prevent blood-letting, and that is to follow them by the next train,” he replied, decisively, and yet not without some secret compunction at the idea of spoiling sport. If it had only been a quarrel of the ordinary type, when honor is satisfied with the first scratch, or with one probably harmless discharge of fire-arms, he would certainly have contrived to arrive too late. But this duel was no light matter, and he felt that speedy interference was imperatively called for.

Psyche, on the other hand, while longing, or perhaps because she was possessed by so ardent a longing to see her injured lover again, was a prey to a thousand feminine doubts and scruples as to the propriety of her appearance on the scene.

“Don’t you think that you had better go on alone, and leave me here?” she asked.

“Nonsense, my dear girl; without you, how shall I be able to persuade Vere that it’s all right, and there’s no further need for fighting? Besides, you couldn’t stay here by yourself,” he replied, impatiently. “You must see it out now. After leading the field all through the run, you surely don’t mean to give in just at the finish.”

“If you think so, I’ll come; but I’m afraid they’ll consider it rather a strange proceeding for a girl,” said Psyche, secretly delighted at having the decision taken out of her hands.

“Of course you’ll come,” replied Charlie. Then, turning to the concierge, he obtained the necessary information about the train to Villeneuve, and, finding that they had an hour to spare, led the way to the restaurant, where they had something to eat before starting in pursuit of the combatants.



## CHAPTER XXVII.

“We rest—a dream has power to poison sleep;  
We rise—one wandering thought pollutes the day;  
We feel, conceive or reason, laugh or weep;  
Embrace fond woe, or cast our cares away.”—SHELLEY.

ON the very evening that Psyche and her brother were speeding up to London in response to Carmen's appeal, Vere was waiting upon M. de Malsherbes for the purpose of wresting from him the secret of his young wife's place of concealment, of which he erroneously supposed him to be cognizant. And while, in the watches of the same night, Carmen was pouring out her troubles in her friend's sympathizing ear, her husband was pacing the floor of his bedroom at the great Parisian hostelry in a state of mind that bordered on frenzy.

In vain he strove to collect his thoughts, and to force himself to take a calm and dispassionate view of his position. All the barriers of self-possession had been swept away by the force of the terrible shock caused by the intelligence of Carmen's faithlessness.

On shallower natures, accustomed to a state of perpetual overflow and peevish friction against the rocks of imaginary troubles, a great calamity has far less effect than on the strong and habitually self-contained.

To the mountain stream the most violent storm will only cause a little more frothing and foaming, and a momentarily quickened rush that soon spends itself in the accustomed channels, while with the mighty reservoir, once its ordinary restraints are destroyed, there is no means of stemming or diverting the roaring torrent that heeds neither boundaries nor landmarks, but dashes wildly on—carrying everything before it, and leaving destruction and death in its wake.

Of this latter type was the upheaval in Vere's inmost soul.

“What have I done to deserve this misery?” he groaned aloud in his anguish. And then his thoughts went back to the happy time of his first meeting with Carmen, and the circumstances that had led to her becoming his wife. True, their relations at first had not been altogether satisfactory. He had failed to apprehend a character and disposition so essentially divergent from his own, and in the light of his later experience he now perceived that his well-meant attempts to mould her into a form more in accordance with his own notions of wifely dignity had gone dangerously near to destroying its essence—perfect love and trustfulness. But while he blamed himself for this lack of delicacy of perception, which had made him appear unsympathetic and cold to a nature that could not exist without sympathy and warmth, he could safely aver that he had never fal-



tered in his affection for his beautiful childlike bride, and in his earnest desire to do his duty by her. Had she left him after their first serious disagreement, while the dark shadow of distrust on her part and of righteous indignation on his still lay between them, he would at least have been able to assign some motive for a step the gravity of which she might well have overlooked in the violence of her passion, and in her ignorance of the world and its ways. But that now—when all that was past and gone, when the cloud had been lifted from both their hearts, and they had pierced through the personal idiosyncrasies that clung like dross around the nugget, and had lighted upon the pure gold within—that *now* she should have chosen deliberately to wreck the happiness they had so carefully built up together—seemed to him as incredible as it was sacrilegious. And yet what else could he believe? If it were not so, most assuredly M. de Malsherbes. . . . The mere passage of this man's hated name across Vere's thoughts diverted them into a fresh channel.

It was no longer of Carmen that he mused—of her winning graces and tender affection, now, alas! as lost to him as her fair name and happiness to herself, but of revenge, speedy and relentless. He, the man of gentle disposition and instinctive hatred of quarrelling and contention in any shape or form, who, from his boyhood up, had shrunk alike from practising or witnessing deeds of cruelty, this same Vere Danvers was possessed with a ferocious longing for the blood of him whom he regarded as his wife's betrayer. The deliberateness and formality of the duel to which he was engaged seemed senseless and unbearable. As his mood was then, he would like to have fought it out on the spot, hand to hand with knife or pistol, in the fashion of the Far West. All this bowing and scraping, this hiding of murderous hate under the mask of external politeness, was sickening and absurdly childish, and added the torment of conscious impotence to his other sufferings. When, at last, he flung himself, without undressing, on to his bed, and sheer bodily exhaustion forced him into an uneasy slumber, he was still gripping his adversary by the throat, and gloating over his death-throes in his dreams.

Next morning he was awakened by a loud tapping at his door, and, springing up to open it, found Jack Holdsworth outside in walking attire.

"Halloo, Danvers, you are dressed; that's all right. Can I come in?" said his friend, suiting the action to the word.

"What's the time?" asked Vere, sleepily, rubbing his eyes and trying to recall his senses.

"Just after eleven. I shall be starting in a few minutes to meet our friend's friend and settle preliminaries, and I thought I'd just look in to ask if you had anything to say about the weapons; of course, the choice lies with them, but there's no harm in my knowing if you've any predilection one way or the other," said Jack, tapping his varnished boots with his cane."

Vere walked slowly to the window, and throwing back the *persiennes*, admitted a flood of bright sunlight that made him wince and blink like an owl. "I'm not half awake yet," he remarked, apolo-



getically. "I can't think what's made me so confoundedly heavy this morning."

"Sitting up to the small hours, and going to bed in your clothes," said the other with a significant glance at the candles, burned down to their sockets, and at Vere's disordered attire.

"Oh yes, I remember; of course, you've got to see M. de Malsherbes this morning. Settle anything you like, so that it comes off as soon as possible."

"It's all the same to you, then—swords or shooting-irons?"

"Quite so."

"Then I'll be off. We shall most likely be obliged to take a trip to the Belgian frontier. There'll be less fear of interruption."

"That means twenty-four hours' delay," said Vere, impatiently.

"It can't be helped, old chap. This isn't a mere newspaper affair—pistols fired at an impossible range, and breakfast together afterwards; honor satisfied; both heroes of the hour, and the best of friends," replied Jack, arranging his tie at the looking-glass; "at least I take it you mean business."

"One of us shall not leave the field alive," said Vere, setting his teeth.

"Just so. Then that means that the other will have to make himself scarce for a bit, so the frontier's the best place for our money. Good-by, old man; try and keep your pecker up. I'll be back to luncheon about one;" and Master Jack departed on his bellicose errand with as much sang-froid as if he were going to arrange for a water-picnic on the Thames, or a luncheon party at Ascot. It was not that he was hard-hearted, or indifferent to Vere's possible fate; but, after all, the chances were even, he argued; and setting so little store on his own life, he was not likely to wax sentimental over his friend's perilous situation.

Left to himself, Vere rang for his bath, and proceeded with his toilet operations. The cold water quickly dispelled his drowsiness, and recalled his wandering faculties. And what a miserable awakening it was! The first violence of his passion had spent itself on the preceding night, and in its place a dull gnawing depression filled his mind. He dare not let his thoughts dwell on Carmen, for the recollection of her ingratitude and shame utterly unnerved him. Even his fierce hatred for M. de Malsherbes had assumed a modified form. While still loathing him as a base deceiver and unprincipled scoundrel, he shrank from the notion of staining his own soul with blood-guiltiness. And yet, how could he avoid it? The choice lay between this and the renunciation of all claim to rank among his compeers as a man of honor, and one possessed of the courage to defend it. It was the every-day struggle which the man of high moral principles, living in a world that theoretically assents to the tenets of Christianity, but is practically governed by its own, has to wage. We go to church and pray that we may learn to forgive our enemies and to turn our cheek to the smiter. But who among the millions of church-goers, not excepting the clergy themselves, ever dreams of acting up to this high ideal? Or, if he does make a feeble attempt



to govern his actions by his religious beliefs and professions, is not imposed upon and scorned by his fellow-men, Christians and infidels alike?

Vere was endowed with a fair share of that noblest form of bravery—moral courage. But that, and his religious scruples combined, was inadequate to enable him to face the dishonor that awaited him if he now failed to meet his adversary in order to slay or be slain. The very fact that his sensitive nature made him shrink involuntarily from suffering or inflicting bodily pain helped to harden his purpose; for how could he be sure that his moral scruples did not arise from physical cowardice? And if this were so, he would lose not only public esteem, but self-respect, in allowing them to prevail.

This argument practically decided his mental struggle. He abhorred and despised the practice of duelling, and yet having regard to the custom of his adopted country, he was bound to fight. Like many better and braver men, he had not the courage to encounter the reproach of cowardice. Let those blame him who have undergone a like ordeal and emerged from it triumphantly.

When Jack Holdsworth returned he found Vere still in his room, busily engaged in writing.

"I know you won't mind charging yourself with these papers in case I fall," said the latter, without looking up from his desk. "I've not gone in for many details. I can leave you to supply those; but I should like my people to know the facts of the case, and that I had no alternative but to fight."

"All right, old man, you may rely upon me if need be; but there's no fear of that," replied Jack, cheerily. "We shall polish off our man as easy as ninepins, and you'll be able to act as chronicler of your own noble deeds."

Vere grasped his friend's out-stretched hand, and shook his head sadly. He wished that he could raise his own spirits to the other's gay level, and retort with a jest; but that was impossible, with his mind fresh from the contemplation of Carmen's unhappy future. Whether he killed her lover or was himself sent to his last account, her lot, and that of their yet unborn child, must be one of sorrow and disgrace. How best to alleviate these, and to defend the innocent little one from the consequences of its mother's guilt and folly, was the subject of his present deepest thought and preoccupation.

Presently he looked up, and said, in an unsteady voice, "I hardly like to trouble you any more about my family concerns, but there's one other favor I should like to ask of you. If this affair terminates fatally for me, as I almost hope it may, would you mind finding out where my—my wife really is? Surely the vicomte will not refuse to tell you *then*?"

"He'd better not," said Jack, viciously, under his breath.

"And when you see her give her this letter; it contains a copy of my will. The provisions are simple enough. All that I possess—and that is not much—is left to her, subject to her becoming the lawful wife of the vicomte within six months of my decease; or, failing that, of her breaking with him entirely, and taking up her



abode at Danverfield if my people can be prevailed upon to receive her."

Jack cleared his throat and looked uncomfortable. He was more touched by his friend's magnanimity than he cared to show, and did not like to throw cold water on his scheme; yet, knowing what he did of the squire, he felt more than dubious as to its feasibility.

"I have written to both my father and mother, and do not think they will refuse my last request," continued Vere, answering his companion's doubts. "I have also taken upon myself to name you as joint executor with my father. You will be on the spot and know how to act; and then, if the old gentleman comes round, you will soon be relieved of all further trouble in the matter."

"Don't talk of trouble, old chap; I'll do what I can to carry out your wishes," said Jack, still struggling with the uncomfortable sensation in his throat, and turning suddenly to gaze fixedly out of the open window into the court-yard below.

"Thank you; you're a true friend," said Vere, heartily, as Jack, muttering something about ordering the *déjeuner*, passed by him and left the room.

Half an hour later the two young men met below in the restaurant, and discussed the details of the campaign in a calm and matter-of-fact manner.

Jack, with the true instinct of his profession, had everything cut and dried, and Vere left himself entirely in his hands. They caught the afternoon train for Villeneuve, where they slept preparatory to the hostile meeting which was fixed for six o'clock on the following morning, arriving there in time for a good night's rest, of which Vere stood sorely in need.

Now that all was settled, Vere had quite recovered his self-possession, and awoke the next day with the determination to do or die as became an Englishman and a gentleman.

Villeneuve was an ugly little village, consisting of one long poplar-lined street, situated in close proximity to an extensive tract of forest land which formed a sort of neutral zone between the two countries, and offered unrivalled advantages to gentlemen desirous of slaughtering one another without the interruption of the police. So accustomed had the portly landlord of the "Trois Ecus" become to the sudden advent of little parties of strangers who slept one night, ordered early breakfast, and departed for a matutinal drive in the sombre forest, that he expressed no curiosity or surprise at receiving Jack's orders couched in the usual terms. Sometimes none of his guests reappeared, but the village undertaker had a job; at others his best bedroom was occupied for weeks or months by a wounded combatant; and this was the class of business that suited him best, for as he would shrewdly remark when making out his bills, "Gentlemen who are ready to risk their lives at the call of honor are generally willing to pay well." Then, again, not unfrequently both champions returned unhurt with their seconds and the local doctor, and sitting side by side at the festive board of the "Trois



Ecus," swore eternal friendship over countless bottles of "tisane" and cognac.

Mine host was a keen observer, and long experience enabled him to diagnose with considerable accuracy the state of mind of the belligerents who sought shelter and refreshment under his roof before the fray. He knew that assumed jollity and recklessness often hide a quaking heart, and that the man of quiet demeanor was more likely to prove a dangerous antagonist than he who bragged loudly of his contempt for death and of his delight in the fierce joy of battle.

Vere he pronounced at once to be one of the right sort, and was correspondingly attentive and obsequious, rising with, or before the lark, in order to attend personally at the breakfast-table, and accompanying his guests to the carriage that was to convey them to the rendezvous.

"Au plaisir de vous revoir, messieurs, I shall take the liberty of preparing a nice little *déjeuner* in case it suits your convenience to return here after your promenade," he said, with a significant glance at the case of pistols that Jack was carrying under his arm. "My rooms also will be at your disposal should you see fit to prolong your visit, and my wife is an excellent nurse."

"I don't doubt it," replied Jack, "but we hope not to need her services. By-the-way, that reminds me the doctor promised to drive with us this morning. Just tell the coachman to call at the address you gave me last night. You are sure that he is a skilful surgeon and a man of discretion?"

"Assuredly, monsieur. He has seen service with the army; and, as for his discretion, I will vouch for him as for myself."

"All right, then we're ready to start," said Jack, taking his seat beside Vere, who was waiting impatiently for this colloquy to finish.

The noisy rattle of the wheels over the uneven pavement made conversation a physical impossibility until the vehicle drew up at the doctor's residence, a few hundred yards outside the village and in close proximity to the railway-station.

"I hope he won't keep us waiting," remarked Vere, pulling out his watch. "It's half-past five already, and I don't want to be late."

"There's lots of time. I questioned the little man about it last night, and he says the place appointed by M. de Malsherbes' friend is not more than half an hour's drive from here," replied Jack, springing out to ring at the bell. Then, returning to the carriage window, he continued, "There's the Paris train just steaming in. I shouldn't wonder if they are in it, and if so, we shall be there before them. Ah, here's the doctor."

As he spoke a brisk little man in semi-military attire bustled down the front garden.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," he cried, courteously returning the young men's salutation. "You are punctual. That is a virtue that I as an *ancien militaire* esteem, particularly on these occasions."

"Take a seat, doctor, and let me introduce you to my friend, Mr. Vere Danvers," said Jack.



"Delighted to make his acquaintance. Shall I instruct the coachman where to drive us?"

"I think he knows; but there's no harm in telling him again."

Accordingly the little doctor put his head out of the window and directed the driver to the Avenue de la Croix, the spot agreed upon between the seconds as the scene of the combat.

The man grinned and touched his hat, and after many whip-crackings and objurgations, the cumbrous vehicle was again set in motion along the road that led to the forest.

It was a lovely morning in early spring. The air was bright and crisp, and the night dews still sparkled on the fresh green foliage of the trees, and depended in heavy drops from the luxuriant undergrowth that bordered the grassy ride down which they were laboriously progressing. Comparative silence had succeeded the deafening rattle and rumble of their vehicle on the hard high-road, and the driver's *Houp-la! Allez! Hée!* as he guided his smoking steeds from one series of ruts into another, formed a not unpleasant accompaniment to the jingling of the harness and the artistically administered *coups de fouet*. As they advanced deeper into the forest, Vere, eagerly drinking in the sweet sights and sounds of Nature, perhaps for the last time, watched with a heavy heart the agile squirrels springing from branch to branch, and timid rabbits scuttering into their burrows. The gay, clear song of the lark, the soft coe-coe of the wood-pigeon, even the clatter of the magpies, disturbed at their morning's conclave, sounded with a tender melancholy in his ear. Happier far seemed the lot of even the most insignificant of Nature's creatures than that of her so-called noblest work—man. They could kill or be killed in fulfilment of their natural instinct without sin or remorse. No dread of the unknown Hereafter, nor torturing anxieties for the dear ones left behind, accompanied their violent exit from life into death. No curse of Cain remained to haunt the representative of the survival of the fittest.

So absorbed was Vere in his painful meditations, that he scarce heard, and certainly paid no attention to, the string of anecdotes, mainly relating to affairs of honor, with which the martially-minded doctor imagined that he was entertaining his companions. We say imagined, because his other listener, Jack, was not sufficiently master of the language to catch the meaning of a tithe of the narrator's valuable utterances.

At length the carriage came to a stand at the entrance to a tolerably wide clearing, in the centre of which stood a battered wooden cross, mounted on a pile of stones.

"A la bonne heure!" cried the doctor. "Here we are, arrived at last. And I think, gentlemen, you will allow that a sweeter spot for our little business never existed. Here you have everything that could be desired. Quiet, seclusion, fresh air, and a charming outlook."

"The others don't appear to have come yet," said Jack, descending and stretching his legs.

"They are not far behind," replied the other. "Listen! Don't you hear the crack of a whip? They are coming by the other road."



Doubtless these gentlemen slept at Dame-Marie, which is almost as near as Villeneuve, but on the other side of the forest."

As he spoke another carriage appeared in sight, and pulled up at the farther end of the avenue.

Two gentlemen descended, one remaining in conversation with the coachman, while the other advanced, hat in hand, to meet Jack, who, with the pistols under his arms and accompanied by the doctor, had strolled leisurely up to the cross.

What seemed to Vere a colloquy of interminable duration intervened. Mechanically he looked on, while Jack and the stranger measured out the distance at which the antagonists were to stand. All sense of presentness and personality had deserted him. He felt no fear, nor even anxiety, as to the result of the conflict. It all seemed like a dream, and the calm indifference of the dreamer who feels himself hurled over precipices, or torn by wild beasts, without moving an eyelid or uttering a cry, had come over him.

Presently Jack returned towards him with a pale, serious face. After bidding the coachman withdraw out of sight and hearing, Jack turned to his friend. "Are you ready, old man?" he asked, hastily.

Vere stared for a moment vacantly at him, and then, with a sigh of awakening consciousness, nodded assent.

"Turn up your collar and aim low," said Jack, in a hoarse whisper as he wrung Vere's hand. "Have you anything more to say, in case of—accidents?"

Vere's heart gave a great bound as he now fully realized that this was no dream, but a dread reality of bloodshed in which he was to enact a part. Mastering his emotion, he replied, gently, "Nothing but to thank you for your great kindness and your promise to look after my poor wife. Tell her I forgave her."

"God bless you, old man—I will," said Jack, as he handed Vere his weapon and walked beside him to place him on his ground.

Simultaneously, the vicomte moved forward, accompanied by his second. But before the adversaries had reached their appointed stations, a sound was heard that caused all to pause and look round.

Down the ride at full speed came a third vehicle; beside the driver sat Charlie Danvers, urging on the horses and shouting at the top of his voice, while at the window appeared a female face, which Jack Holdsworth instantly recognized in spite of its deathly pallor and strained expression.

"By Jove! It's Psyche herself. How on earth did she get here?" he cried, excitedly. Then, without waiting for Vere's reply, he dashed off to meet the new arrivals.



## CHAPTER XXVIII.

“Earthlier happy is the rose distilled  
Than that which withering on the virgin thorn  
Grows, lives, and dies in single blessedness.”

SHAKESPEARE.

“The French say that ‘it is always the unexpected that arrives,’ and you are a living proof of it,” remarked Jack gayly as he helped Psyche to alight, and felt her cold, little hand trembling in his. Surprise had thrown him off his guard. Wounded dignity, offended pride, the despair itself that had led him to vow eternal hatred against his heartless divinity, all were forgotten in the joy of this unexpected meeting. Her presence here appeared as an omen of good to him, and both voice and manner betrayed what he felt.

In spite of her terrible anxiety and excitement, the girl’s heart thrilled with happiness at the knowledge that it was still in her power to make amends for her former unkindness. A faint color rose to her cheeks, her eyes drooped beneath his eager, questioning gaze, and to hide her confusion she turned her head towards the amazed combatants, who stood their ground awaiting the explanation of this unforeseen interruption. “Thank God, we are here in time,” she said, in a voice quivering with emotion. “But why doesn’t Vere come and speak to me? Mr. Holdsworth, please bring him here at once.”

Jack hesitated. “It’s a little awkward, don’t you know, to ask a man to turn his back on an enemy when they are met in fair fight.”

“But I tell you there is nothing to fight about. Carmen is safe in London, and M. de Malsherbes had nothing to do with her disappearance,” cried Psyche, impetuously. “Here, Charlie—Mr. Holdsworth seems inclined to doubt my word; perhaps he may believe you.”

“It’s true enough what she says,” replied her brother, apologetically.

Jack’s blood was up, and he felt that, having gone so far, it would be no easy matter to withdraw his man from the field without compromising his dignity. However, he could not resist Psyche’s urgent request; and as she was evidently prepared to take the affair in hand herself in case of his refusal, he stalked solemnly off to communicate the news to the vicomte’s second. This gentleman, a former college-mate of the vicomte’s, had—in the course of his career as a political journalist—found it advisable to seek refuge on the shores of *la perfide Albion* from the too-pressing attentions of the Imperial police, and while there had devoted his mind to the study of “Engleesh as she is spoke.” Consequently, although his knowl-



edge of colloquial English was, to say the least of it, superficial, he had from the first intimated his readiness to carry on the negotiations in that language, much to Jack's relief. Thus far all had been pretty plain sailing, and any conversational chasms they had encountered had been bridged over by signs, accompanied by a "*Comprenez?*" from Jack, and an "All right, as you will," from the other—who during his sojourn among us had imbibed a great respect for the *gentilhomme Anglais*. Now, however, Jack's hurried and slightly confused narration of what had happened utterly overtasked the Frenchman's powers. But being too proud to confess his ignorance, and too polite to refuse the lady's evident desire to have speech with his friend's adversary, he contented himself with bowing and saying, "All right—go on, sir;" and then, turning to the vicomte, he invented such explanations as seemed most plausible under the circumstances, and retired with him to their carriage to await the course of events.

When Jack, on his way to parley with the enemy, had whispered to his friend, "Carmen is safe, and the vicomte as innocent as a new-born babe," Vere had heard the words with his outer ears, but for the moment they conveyed no meaning to his understanding. His nerves were strung to a pitch of almost unbearable tension; and although externally calm, so intense was his mental perturbation that the arrival on the scene of Psyche and her brother had caused nothing but a dazed sense of wonderment not unmixed with impatience at the prospect of further delay. He felt like a condemned convict with the rope around his neck, to whom each moment that intervenes between the final arrangements and the falling of the fatal drop is an eternity of agony.

It was not until he stood face to face with his favorite cousin and heard her reiterate the astounding intelligence that he was able to grasp the facts of the situation. Then, when it slowly dawned upon him that his dearly-loved wife was unharmed and blameless, that all the tortures of mind which he had suffered were self-invented and needless, and that there was no longer any call for him to purge his honor with blood, the sense of relief was almost overpowering. Nevertheless, he succeeded in maintaining his outward bearing of composure; and although his eyes were dim and his voice trembled as he grasped Psyche's hand and whispered, gratefully, "God bless you, my guardian angel," he was able to give his attention to Jack's request that they should immediately hold a council of war to decide their course of action with regard to the arrested duel.

"I don't see what there is to decide," cried Psyche. "You challenged M. de Malsherbes because you believed that he had injured you. Now you find that you were mistaken; all that you have to do is to offer your humble apologies and shake hands and be friends."

"Oh, upright judge—most learned judge! A second Daniel," cried Vere, gayly. "But you are doubtless unaware that, according to the immutable laws of the duello, I, personally, have no voice in the matter. I can only act through my friend and second."

"Well, Mr. Holdsworth heard what I said, and is, I presume, gift-



ed with sufficient penetration and common-sense to see the force of it. Let him eat your humble pie for you if you like," rejoined the girl, with a roguish glance in Jack's direction.

But our lieutenant had had time to recover himself, and felt inclined to stand somewhat upon his dignity. Besides, he was not a little nettled by the calm manner in which Psyche had assumed the direction of affairs, and the free-and-easy tone she adopted with reference to so serious and formal a subject. So he shook his head gravely as he replied, with a smile of superior wisdom, "I think Miss Danvers is a little out of her element, pardonably so, for naturally the rules of duelling do not form part of a young lady's polite education."

"Nor of those of an English gentleman," retorted Psyche, warmly. "I held a better opinion of you, Mr. Holdsworth, than to believe that you would have encouraged these brutal and outlandish practices. For Vere possibly there was some excuse, since he was maddened by a sense of his imaginary wrongs; but for you to act as his aider and abettor, I consider simply scandalous."

"My dear Psyche," interrupted Vere, "you forget that it was at my urgent entreaty that Mr. Holdsworth kindly consented to be my second, and see me through with this unpleasant affair. Besides, you must remember that we are in France, where duelling—"

"Don't trouble to stand up for me, Danvers," said Jack, bitterly; "your cousin always was hard upon me, and always will be, I suppose."

He looked so unhappy as he spoke that the girl's righteous indignation suffered a considerable relapse. Still, she felt that he ought not to be let off too easily, so she continued in a milder tone: "There you're wrong again, Mr. Holdsworth. Whatever I may have been in the past, I have no wish to be hard upon you now; and if you will undertake to bring matters to a satisfactory conclusion, without any unnecessary delay, I will forgive you for your share in this foolish and wicked transaction."

During this tirade Jack had been looking sullenly on the ground. To say truth, now that he considered his conduct from her point of view, he was more than half ashamed of himself, for what would have been his feelings had she arrived too late to avert bloodshed? None the less he felt bound to protest against this feminine interference in so purely masculine an affair. "What do women know or care about honor?" he was about to ask scornfully, when something in her voice led him to raise his eyes to hers. What he read in her glance we cannot exactly explain, but it had the effect of disarming his pride and making him feel, as he told her afterwards when they were alone, "that it was rather pleasant than otherwise to be scolded by some people." And when she, smiling up at him, demanded an explanation of this phenomenal state of mind, he retorted, still more enigmatically, "Because, don't you know, it proves that the scolder takes an interest in you; and if she happens to be somebody you love—well, don't you know, it's nice to feel that you were mistaken when you thought she didn't care a brass farthing what be-



came of you." To which Psyche's only reply was a happy laugh, and another of those indescribable glances which sufficed to raise the lieutenant's spirits to boiling-point. But we are anticipating.

Jack, being reduced to submission, raised no further difficulties with regard to opening negotiations with the enemy's camp, and Psyche volunteered to accompany him, as being most fitted to furnish a detailed explanation of the events which had led her cousin to challenge the vicomte, and of his reasons for now wishing to withdraw from it.

The charm of her presence was not without its influence in deciding the vicomte's friend; and although he found his principal still disposed to insist upon fighting the quarrel out with the man whom, by some curious mental curvature, he persisted in regarding as his enemy and rival, the joint efforts of the two seconds prevailed, and M. de Malsherbes was at last induced to accept Vere's apology.

It is scarcely necessary to give a detailed account of the sayings and doings of the merry party that assembled at the well-spread table of the "Trois Ecus" an hour later. Having despatched reassuring telegrams to Carmen, his father, and Mademoiselle Delaforet, Vere gave himself up to the enjoyment of the luxury of perfect relief and light-hearted gayety after a long paroxysm of mental anguish. Psyche had her own reasons for feeling contented and happy, and, strange to say, although neither confessed to it in so many words, they were the same that caused Master Jack to overflow with mirth and good spirits to such an extent that the naturally serious and sober-minded Charlie caught the infection and laughed and joked with the best of them. The only discontented face was that of the doctor, whom they had invited to the *déjeuner* by way of compensation for the loss of his expected "case." Apart from professional considerations, the bellicose little man felt it almost like a personal insult that the combatants should have separated without exchanging fire. "Sacré femme ça gâté tout," he growled to himself when Vere politely informed him that the dispute was accommodated, and his services would no longer be called into requisition. However, that did not prevent him from accepting the invitation, and, by working hard at the comestibles, he gradually ate and drank himself into a better temper.

Naturally, Vere was all impatience to see Carmen again; and as there was nothing to detain them at Villeneuve, the happy quartette caught the mid-day train back to Paris and thence on by the night mail to London without breaking the journey.

The meeting between the young husband and wife can better be imagined than described. As she hung weeping on his neck and thanked God a thousand times for having restored her dear one to her safe and sound, Carmen informed Vere of her father's death, which had taken place on the very day of Psyche's departure. "Poor dear; he died in his sleep, quite quietly and without pain," she cried, her sorrow momentarily overcoming the joy she felt at being once more under the protection of her husband's strong arm.



"The doctors say it was heart disease and general exhaustion of the system, caused by severe privation. And the excitement of seeing me again, added to the fatigue of the journey, brought on a crisis. Dear soul! They say that, in any case, he could not have lived many months; but to think of his dying without seeing you and knowing how happy his daughter is."

Vere strove to console her as best he could, and, before long, had the satisfaction of bringing her to a calmer frame of mind. The blow, severely as she felt it at the time, was softened by the joy attendant upon her reunion with her husband and the anticipation, which was likely soon to be realized, of her becoming a proud mother.

The funeral of Monsieur Mendes was conducted as quietly and speedily as possible. Charlie was wanted down at Danverfield, and as Carmen insisted upon accompanying her father's remains to the cemetery, Psyche kindly volunteered to remain behind and go with her. The only other mourners were Vere and Jack Holdsworth, the latter having altered his mind with regard to his projected visit to the south of France. He had come to the conclusion that the air of England was best suited to his complaint, which had entered on an entirely new phase since his meeting with Psyche.

This sad duty being disposed of, it only remained for Vere to conduct his wife on the long promised visit to Danverfield. But here an unforeseen difficulty arose, as Carmen, in the hurry of her departure, had left the bulk of her luggage behind her at the chalet. Consequently she had to write to Mademoiselle Delaforet to ask her to forward her clothes, and until they arrived she was unable to start.

Meanwhile Psyche received such urgent messages from her uncle, expressing a wish for her immediate return, that at last she decided to precede her cousin and his wife.

"You've no idea how fidgety your father has become since his accident," she said when Vere tried to persuade her to wait and accompany them. "And I know he won't be easy in his mind till he has it from me that all is satisfactorily settled."

"But surely Charlie will have explained—"

"I dare say he has, but that's not enough. Uncle pins his faith on me; I'm sure I don't know why, but the fact remains," laughed the girl.

Jack Holdsworth was standing near her, and remarked in an undertone, "I see nothing remarkable in that, I do the same myself."

"Let us hope it isn't a sign that you, too, are approaching your dotage," she replied, maliciously; then, turning to her cousin, "If you don't mind, I will write to say that I shall go down by the ten-o'clock train to-morrow morning."

"I'm going north to-morrow to my uncle's, and shall be pleased to escort Miss Danvers," interrupted Jack, boldly.

"What a lucky coincidence," said Vere, with a meaning smile.

Psyche said nothing, but turned with a heightened color to Carmen, who was listening with all her ears to the conversation, being anxious to perfect herself in English as speedily as possible. "You



won't mind travelling with Vere alone?" Psyche asked, by way of saying something.

"Oh no," replied Carmen; "with him I would go anywhere. But tell me what is coincidence?"

The girl thought a moment. "It means two unforeseen events happening at the same time."

"Not necessarily unforeseen," laughed Vere. "Accidentally done on purpose best describes some coincidences."

Carmen shook her head, thoroughly mystified. "I understand Psyche better than you," she said.

"So does Jack," replied Vere, while Jack grinned, and Psyche tried to look sternly unconscious of his meaning.

Whether Vere's insinuations had aroused Psyche's sense of feminine dignity, or whether it was due to another revulsion in her feelings towards him, Jack could not tell, but during their journey northward the girl was colder and more formal in her bearing than she had been since their meeting at Villeneuve. Having secured a compartment to themselves, Master Jack had determined to take advantage of this favorable opportunity for once more urging his suit; and, judging from various indications, he hoped this time to carry the attack to a successful issue. But even a forlorn hope to succeed must be directed against a breach, or some weak point in the enemy's defences, and on this occasion he could discover none. Psyche was scrupulously polite and friendly, and kept up the conversation on any and every subject that presented itself with unusual vivacity; but whenever Jack tried to give it a more intimate and personal turn she adroitly tripped him up, and led it off at a tangent, so that at last, in mingled rage and despair, he lapsed into a gloomy silence.

Had he been the wariest of campaigners, Jack could not have adopted tactics more disconcerting to his fair adversary. Psyche felt that, for both of them to sit gazing mumchance out of window, would be not only embarrassing, but likely to lead to the explanation that she foresaw and half dreaded; and yet how to keep up a monologue during the remainder of the journey? For all her assumed self-possession, the girl's heart was beating quite as fast as her lover's. Almost for the first time in her life, she felt nervous and uncomfortable in a *tête-à-tête* with one of the opposite sex, and, worse than all, seemed not to know her own mind. That Jack loved her deeply and sincerely she had no doubt, and she was equally convinced that her heart had gone out to meet his; and yet, while expecting and longing for the words that would seal her fate, she felt an anxious desire to postpone to the last moment the surrender of her liberty. To her strong and somewhat masculine nature there was something repellent in the idea of the marriage-tie. Its mysteries and solemnities terrified her virgin imagination, and the thought that it entailed duties and responsibilities that, once accepted, could not be shirked, made her ask herself tremblingly if she was capable of fulfilling them worthily, and if love alone was sufficient compensation for the sacrifice of the freedom of thought and action that had hitherto been her chief delight and pride?



She was aroused from her troubled cogitation by Jack pulling out his watch and remarking, in a sarcastic voice, "You will be glad to hear that we are due in less than a quarter of an hour."

"Why glad?" asked Psyche, taken off her guard.

"Well, you don't seem to be enjoying the journey much in my society."

"Now Mr. Holdsworth—"

"Don't apologize, pray. It's rather for me to do so for having thrust my unwelcome presence upon you. I was a blind idiot, and that's the plain truth."

"If you go on like that against yourself, I shall have to take up the cudgels in your defence," said Psyche, striving to assume a gay tone, although she felt the dreaded moment was at hand.

"Nothing you can say will convince me to the contrary," replied Jack, with a mournful decision that almost made her laugh. "Not content with having my wings singed twice, and pretty handsomely too, I must needs come fluttering round the candle again."

"Well, perhaps that wasn't overwise; but I hope you don't blame the poor candle?" And here, for the life of her, she couldn't resist the temptation of looking into his face with a mischievous smile.

"Yes I do," said Jack, savagely; "for this time you came after me just when I thought I was getting over my folly so nicely too."

"I'm so sorry, but I really couldn't help it. How was I to know that you would be with Vere at that outlandish place?"

"No, of course it wasn't your fault, and you mustn't take any notice of what I say. I've no right to bore you with my troubles."

Psyche's eyes filled with tears; he looked so sad, poor fellow, and spoke so nobly. "They don't bore me at all," she said softly, forgetting her fears, and yielding blindly to the impulses of her affection.

"I was a fool to go on hoping against hope," continued Jack, inspecting his boots.

"I don't think so;" and then, as the full significance of her words flashed across her mind she blushed crimson, and gazed earnestly out of the window, almost hoping that he had not caught them.

But Jack's ears were quick. He looked up, and, seizing both her hands, forced her to look him in the face. "Do you really mean what you say?"

Their eyes met, and that glance set Psyche's wavering doubts at rest. "Yes," she said, "if you *will* have it so."

At that moment the train pulled up at a station, and before Jack had time to do more than press a loving kiss on her lips, Charlie Danvers appeared at the carriage door.

"Oh, here you are, you two," he cried. "Why, Psyche, you look as if you had forgotten your destination; have you been asleep?"

"Perhaps I have," laughed his sister, recovering her self-possession, "and you disturbed me in a most delicious dream."

"Well, I must say that's a polite way of treating Mr. Holdsworth."

"Oh, never mind me, Charlie; I'm used to hardships. Besides, I may tell you in confidence that, if your sister was dreaming, so was



I," replied Jack, as he turned to escort Psyche to the Danverfield carriage, leaving the conveniently obtuse Charlie to collect and follow with their impedimenta.

Three days later Vere and his wife arrived at Danverfield, and the long-deferred reconciliation took place between father and son. Forgiveness, like mercy, "blesseth him that gives and him that takes," and, under the influence of his new-found happiness, the old squire's acerbity of temper almost disappeared. His antipathy to foreigners likewise received its death-blow on Carmen's first appearance, and before long, her warm, affectionate nature and little, winning graces made the old man her most devoted admirer.

As a matter of course, kind old Mrs. Danvers was transported to the seventh heaven by this accession to her family party, and the early prospect of yet another arrival. In fact, Carmen was petted and made so much of, that Psyche playfully declared herself quite jealous.

"Well, my dear, you've no reason to complain. A little bird has whispered in my ear that a certain Mr. Jack—staying not a hundred miles from here—means to carry you off *nolens volens*, and so I think it wiser to get on with the new love before the old one takes wing," said her uncle.

"That naughty boy has not kept his promise. I particularly ordered him to keep our engagement a secret till I gave him leave to tell," cried Psyche, indignantly.

"Oh, then it is an engagement! I'm awfully glad to hear it. Jack's a real good fellow," said Vere, warmly.

"You didn't know, then?"

"No, we only suspected. From what my boy told me, and from the young gentleman's assiduous visits, we thought mischief was brewing, but that was all; but now, out of your own mouth you stand condemned," chuckled the squire.

"Well, since I have discovered the sort of treatment that awaits me here, I sha'n't keep the poor boy any longer in doubt and uncertainty, and if he comes to-day, I shall tell him that he may ask your blessing and write to my father for his sanction to our engagement."

"And I'll answer for both. A young man who goes as well to hounds as he does is bound to make a good husband. Moreover, I shall tell him that the sooner he begins getting you broken to double harness the better," replied her uncle, in high glee.

"I, too, shall have a counsel to offer him," said Vere, taking his cousin's hand and pressing it affectionately—"one of which I have learned the truth by my own experience."

"And that is?" asked Psyche.

"In Love—if Love be Love, if Love be ours,  
Faith and Unfaith can ne'er be equal powers.  
Unfaith in aught is want of faith in all,"

quoted Vere.

"Jack stands in no need of that," replied Psyche, confidently.  
"He swears that he loves me 'all in all'—and I believe him."

THE END.

Shall



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
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# HARPER'S MAGAZINE FOR 1886.

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The two novels now in course of publication—Miss WOOLSON'S "East Angels" and Mr. HOWELLS'S "Indian Summer"—easily take the foremost place in current serial fiction. These will run through several Numbers, and, upon their completion, will be followed by stories from Mrs. DINAH MULOCK CRAIK, author of "John Halifax, Gentleman," and R. D. BLACKMORE, author of "Lorna Doone."

The great literary event of the year will be the publication of a series of papers—taking the shape of a story, and depicting characteristic features of American Society—written by CHARLES DUDLEY WARNER, and illustrated by C. S. REINHART—the materials for which have been gathered by the author and artist during the past summer at the principal American pleasure resorts, North and South.

Beginning in the January Number, a New Editorial Department, discussing topics suggested by current literature, will be contributed by Mr. W. D. HOWELLS.

## OTHER FEATURES, LITERARY AND ARTISTIC.

Among other attractions for the year may be mentioned the continuation of the series of papers on "Great American Industries" and "American Cities;" the continuation of Mr. E. A. ABBEY'S series of illustrations for "She Stoops to Conquer;" "Sketches of the Avon," by ALFRED PARSONS; papers on "The Navies of Europe," by Sir EDWARD REED, illustrated; curious studies of American Colonial History, by Colonel T. W. HIGGINSON; sketches of "Pioneer Life" in Tennessee and Kentucky, by EDMUND KIRKE and Colonel JOHN MASON BROWN, illustrated; more sketches of "Frontier Military Life," by R. F. ZOGBAUM, with the author's illustrations; illustrated papers on the "Blue Grass Region" and "Cumberland Mountain Folk," by JAMES LANE ALLEN; "Southern Sketches," by REBECCA HARDING DAVIS; important "Social Studies," by Dr. RICHARD T. ELY; studies in Natural History, illustrated by ALFRED PARSONS, WILLIAM HAMILTON GIBSON, and J. C. BEARD; illustrated sketches of adventure connected with the hunting of "Large Game in America," etc.

While HARPER'S MAGAZINE has in England a larger circulation than any other periodical of its class, it will be the aim of its publishers and conductors not only to make it representative of what is best in American literature and art, but also—as indicated in the above announcements—to give especial attention to American subjects, selected with reference to their popular interest.

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